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# Rethinking Bibliotherapy: Portraits of Gifted Adult Readers

## Abstract

Gifted individuals have unique socioemotional needs due to their sensitivity and intensities. Bibliotherapy is often recommended to gifted persons to help them understand themselves and others and to address affective needs. However, bibliotherapy's roots are embedded within a clinical background, thus requiring an element of discussion. Instead, I argue that gifted adults use metacognition to replace the need for discussion. Portraits of gifted adult readers (N=7) in their 30s-50s illustrate that metacognition has occurred over their lifespan regarding their reading, with only one participant actively engaging in discussion, and book selection meets the socioemotional needs of the reader. The findings show that using literature to meet the socioemotional needs of a reader without engaging in formal discussion and instead utilizing metacognition is a new form of bibliotherapy, defined as *self-determining bibliotherapy*.

Portraits were synthesized into four themes: gifted reading, reading to address affective needs, the bibliotherapeutic process, and metacognition and annotation. Portraits examine gifted adult readers over their lifespan, using the lens of the bibliotherapeutic process as the conceptual framework for the study: identification (recognizing), catharsis (feeling), insight (thinking), and universalization (applying) (Halstead, 2009). Each portrait's resonant refrain is the form for reading; however, there is overlap in these forms across participants. Commonalities across portraits include: searching for identity, feelings of social isolation, self-doubt through imposter syndrome, reliance on audiobooks or podcasts in adulthood to allow for multitasking, meaningful novels, and using metacognition. The novels that the gifted readers spoke about over their lifespans had long-lasting effects, with some participants returning to meaningful novels throughout their lives. The adults engaged in self-determining bibliotherapy when using metacognition and applying the bibliotherapeutic process to their readings. This action can be covert or overt. Self-determining bibliotherapy also requires us to broaden the definition of discussion to include internal conversations through engagement with metacognition, annotations, and over lapses of time.

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Portraits of Gifted Adult Readers

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Presented to  
the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Jervaise M. Pileggi

June 2023

Advisor: Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein

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Title: Rethinking Bibliotherapy: Portraits of Gifted Adult Readers  
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### **Abstract**

Gifted individuals have unique socioemotional needs due to their sensitivity and intensities. Bibliotherapy is often recommended to gifted persons to help them understand themselves and others and to address affective needs. However, bibliotherapy's roots are embedded within a clinical background, thus requiring an element of discussion. Instead, I argue that gifted adults use metacognition to replace the need for discussion. Portraits of gifted adult readers (N=7) in their 30s-50s illustrate that metacognition has occurred over their lifespan regarding their reading, with only one participant actively engaging in discussion, and book selection meets the socioemotional needs of the reader. The findings show that using literature to meet the socioemotional needs of a reader without engaging in formal discussion and instead utilizing metacognition is a new form of bibliotherapy, defined as *self-determining bibliotherapy*.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction to the Study**

### **Researcher Introduction and Personal Relevance**

Literature has a unique power. We can read it to escape or to learn. We can imagine worlds both similar and different to our own. Literature allowed the rolling moors of England to come alive for a young woman living on the Colorado prairie. Literature shapes our lives. Who would we be without literature? Without stories of the past and the sharing of knowledge? Literature has always been my friend. A constant companion in my life. A place I know I can retreat to explore a new world, see the nuances of human experiences, and have a well-ordered ending—hopefully. From a young age, I remember escaping to reading. My family had little money, but our house was always rich with books. My mother, a woman who read for pleasure, always required that we read and played outside before we could watch television. As a result, my mother cultivated my love for literature at a young age. We checked out books from the library, and on special occasions, we would go to the bookstore and purchase books. I treasured these novels, which sat on my pink wooden bookshelf in my room—my place for books—my cherished friends. As I matured, my taste in literature evolved, which has continued to adulthood.

There are novels I devour with an almost insatiable hunger, and others I drag my heels with hesitation to finish. Sometimes the reluctance is because I am bored, but those

books I usually dismiss—my motto: life is too short for a bad book! Most of the time, it is because I want to cherish the book, slowly savoring every moment, or I use books as an incentive for tasks completed. I will sometimes reread a passage several times, attempting to relish in every word. Sometimes, I cannot handle the content because I am not in an emotional state to cope with the themes. I find myself returning to books and series, those characters who I consider old friends and their storylines a predictable reprieve from reality.

My intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) as a gifted woman and reader is integral to my identity. It is through my lived experiences and my lens that I frame this research. Books have the unique ability to export us to a new environment, and as a gifted reader, my engagement with books started at an earlier age. My Grammy and Grampy and my mother and father each bought me a book that was customized with my name, which is significant when you are a child with a unique name, and the names of my family members; I thought it was the most wonderful gift in the world. From there, I found myself reading all different genres of books to experience stories. By high school, I found myself concurrently reading the *Harry Potter* series, the four books out, and *Wuthering Heights*. These novels helped me experience the larger world as I learned about rolling moors and unrequited love, friendships, persistence, and magical worlds—both real and imagined.

When it came time to select my undergraduate major, I chose English because I could determine no better education than reading literature daily for coursework. I loved delving into British Literature and reading the stories that shaped writers' understandings

through novels. When I became an English teacher, I cultivated a love and passion for literature—both contemporary young adult (YA) and classics. I read fifty novels a year, mostly YA, to recommend the right book at the right time for students. Literature can be evocative, cathartic, and instructive. Engagement with literature can help readers discover themselves, their environment, and the people in the world.

Literature has the power to resonate with the reader. My own story is evidence of this power. Tyler (2013) asserted that the power of literature is a means to give “an individual a chance to explore vicariously kinds of situations which are too dangerous, too fraught with consequences for him to explore fully in reality. ... [Literature] involves modes of thinking, or critical interpretation, emotional reactions, interests, and the like” (pp. 28-29). Bibliotherapy functions as an opportunity for readers to engage with their text and explore the world differently. Bibliotherapy is often recommended for gifted learners to learn about themselves. It can be paired with metacognition to allow gifted learners to reflect on their understandings derived from literature.

### **Background of the Problem**

Gifted students engage with literature at a deep level and have a passion for reading at earlier ages (Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Hébert & Kent, 2000; Ingram, 2008; Jeon, 1992; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009; Weingarten, 1956). Although reading preferences differ between male and female readers (Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009), gifted readers explore and question the motives of fictional characters (Adderholt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Jeon, 1992). Gifted students have rich imaginations, making reading a vicarious experience (Hébert, 1991; Jeon, 1992; Kerr & McKay, 2014).



Gifted students have various affective needs that can be addressed by connecting with the literature they read (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 2009).

Gifted students who read about the trials, tribulations, successes, and moments of weakness of fictional or real characters can be more willing to apply these concepts to their lives or the lives of others (Adderholt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; Ingram, 2003).

Bibliotherapy can serve as a way to meet a reader's needs; however, it has no single definition, and its use differs depending on where bibliotherapy occurs. For the remainder of the text, bibliotherapy and developmental bibliotherapy will be used as interchangeable terms. Developmental bibliotherapy will only be specified if needed for clarity. Clinical bibliotherapy will be specified if the discussion centers around that form of bibliotherapy, which takes place with a clinician, including psychologists and psychiatrists. In the 1950s and 1960s, bibliotherapy emerged in new fields beyond the clinical application, including education. Zaccaria and Moses (1968) presented bibliotherapy<sup>1</sup> as a therapeutic medium for teachers and counselors to address student mental health. Moses and Zaccaria (1969) published ten guiding principles for how bibliotherapy has evolved to address needs. The next evolution occurred when Rubin (1978) determined that bibliotherapy could be divided into three classifications

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depending on participants, settings, and leaders. Rubin (1978) defined clinical bibliotherapy as “the use of literature – primarily imaginative – with groups of clients with emotional or behavioural problems” (p. 4), with goals ranging from a change in behavior to insight. Developmental bibliotherapy was defined as “the use of both imaginative and didactic literature with groups of ‘normal individuals’” (Rubin, 1978, p. 5). *Normal* can be defined as geared to the average person, not one who is gifted or with an intellectual disability. The goals of developmental bibliotherapy are to foster *normal* development and self-actualization or to preserve mental health. Rubin (1978) shared that discussion was a common characteristic needed in all three forms to consolidate benefits.

### **Gap in the Literature**

The affective needs of students are often not met as they have unique emotional characteristics (Clark, 2013; Cross, 2011; Eddles-Hirsch et al., 2010; Rinn et al., 2010; Wiley, 2020). Developmental bibliotherapy is a technique used to guide gifted readers to understand themselves, others, and the environment (Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2011; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Siegle, 2013; Sousa, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 2009). Though gifted adults may use bibliotherapy to meet their affective needs (Halstead, 2009; Weingarten, 1956), the adaptation of developmental bibliotherapy from a clinical background required guided discussion rather than just reading to interpret and understand (Brown, 1975; Hoagland, 1972; Moses & Zaccaria 1969; Rubin, 1978; Zaccaria & Moses, 1968). These scholars maintained that guided discussion is integral to bibliotherapy, but gifted individuals

engage in bibliotherapy without discussion, and I argue that this is an understudied phenomenon.

Gifted learners have various socioemotional characteristics beyond their peers; these tend to increase sensitivity and intensity (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009; Webb, 2013). There are a variety of affective areas that impact gifted students, including anxiety, depression, overexcitabilities, perfectionism, and underachievement. Anxiety can be combined with the stress of taking risks for fear of failure (Allen Heath et al., 2005; Halstead, 2009; Hébert & Furner, 1997; Hébert et al., 2001). Depression and personal sadness can impact gifted learners because of their sensitivities (Delisle, 1990; Kline & Meckstroth, 1985; Vialle, 2007). Overexcitabilities (OE), a term coined by Kazimierz Dabrowski, is embodied by sensitivities that are heightened and are found at a higher degree in gifted individuals (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). Finally, perfectionism and underachievement are predominant in gifted students (Clark, 2013; Greenspon, 2007; Mofield & Chakraborti-Ghosh, 2010; Nugent, 2000; Siegle, 2013).

Developmental bibliotherapy was frequently recommended to gifted readers as a way to understand themselves, others, and the environment (Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2011; Kerr & McKay, 2014; Siegle, 2013; Sousa, 2009; VanTassel-Baska, 2009). The most common adaptation for gifted education was the inclusion of biographies to allow gifted students an opportunity to read about someone like themselves who persevered through difficulties (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009). Bibliotherapy can also be used as a prevention strategy to model mental health concerns and problem-solving techniques (Cross et al.,

2009; Delisle, 1990). Finally, bibliotherapy is recommended to address gifted readers' affective needs (Adderholt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992).

The decision to require an element of guided discussion for developmental bibliotherapy (Brown, 1975; Hoagland, 1972; Moses & Zaccaria, 1969; Rubin, 1978; Zaccaria & Moses, 1968) has created an intentional gap in understanding how a gifted individual might read and respond to literature. The element of discussion renounces any opportunity for individual self-determining bibliotherapy as a method to allow a gifted person to meet their socioemotional needs. I argue that gifted readers engage in bibliotherapy whenever they read, whether they have a formal discussion or not. Bauer (1991) shared in a letter from an author to teachers that some books need to be a private experience. Gifted readers might be reading to escape, for self-concept, and to address multipotentiality (Halstead, 2009).

### **Purpose of Study**

This study aimed to examine gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy. The research explored how gifted adults engage with literature and their reflections on how they used literature as children and/or adolescents. The impact of bibliotherapy on gifted adult readers' affective needs was explored. When readers engage with literature, they can progress through the bibliotherapeutic process: identification, catharsis, insight, and universalization. Readers working through the bibliotherapeutic process do not always engage in order, and a reader may not experience all four elements with any given piece

of literature. As a researcher, I hoped to determine if gifted readers use metacognition (viz., understanding one's thought processes) in lieu of discussion with others.

### **Research Questions**

The primary question was: How do gifted adults use bibliotherapy? The sub questions included:

1. How do gifted adults perceive bibliotherapy as a mechanism to address affective needs as children and/or adolescents, and adults?
2. How does bibliotherapy meet affective needs in gifted adults, and as children and/adolescents?
3. How does the use of bibliotherapy change from youth to adulthood?
4. How do gifted adults utilize metacognition in the bibliotherapeutic process?

### **Educational Significance of the Research Problem**

The research indicated a lack of cohesive long-lasting definitions for using bibliotherapy without a guided discussion element. The term for this varies among *independent bibliotherapy* (Halstead, 2009), *reading bibliotherapy* (McCarty Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2012), *free reading* (Agnes, 1947), and *informal bibliotherapy* (Brewster, 2009). Moreover, the literature indicates that not all books read require discussion following completion. Bauer (1991) asserts that some books must be read privately and should not be a classroom experience. Bauer (1991) advised, "I still believe there are books meant to be read alone, a kind of personal letter between author and reader" (para. 12). Halstead (2009) shared, "Many readers continue to mull over books long after they have finished them" (p. 115). With this idea, gifted individuals may need time to

ruminate over books. I hoped to understand if gifted individuals used metacognition to meet their affective needs through engagement with literature.

There was very little in the research around bibliotherapy without an element of discussion. Weingarten (1956) discussed how reading had met the socioemotional needs of gifted adolescents and young adults. However, Zaccaria and Moses (1968), Moses and Zaccaria (1969), Hoagland (1972), and Brown (1975) defined bibliotherapy as requiring an element of discussion. Moses and Zaccaria (1969) asserted ten principles that are involved in developmental bibliotherapy, with one having a long-lasting impact on the future practice of bibliotherapy:

Principle VIII. The reading of the literature by the individual should be accompanied or followed up by discussion and counseling. The discussion or counseling which accompanies or follows the reading is a key step in the process of working the problem through to eventual insight and developing more effective coping behavior. (p. 403)

Hoagland (1972) reinforced this concept stating, “It is important that the individual not only read books but also participate in discussion and counseling” (p. 391). These two are the most-referenced gifted bibliotherapy articles and are the root cause of why the literature does not address bibliotherapy without an element of guided discussion.

This gap in the literature created an opening to explore the many ways gifted readers engage with their texts when they are not having a guided discussion surrounding the concepts. For example, Jack and Ronan (2008) asserted:

Reading can take place in a variety of conditions ranging from guidance in the library or classroom to formal psychotherapy, to groups, to private, independently-directed or purely accidental self-help. Bibliotherapy is used by accident or intention, with people of all ages, with people in institutions as well as outpatients and with healthy people who wish to share literature as a means of personal growth and development. (p. 172)

If reading takes place in different conditions and for various reasons with different outcomes, the research could discover that the use of metacognition by gifted individuals may serve as a quasi-discussion component in late teenage years through adulthood. The research explored if gifted adults reach catharsis and universalization through reading and if they later apply that to their lives. Contrastingly, the research explored how bibliotherapy could be used as a maladaptive coping strategy. Reading can be therapeutic and cathartic. However, it can also cross the line to being less helpful; determining where that line exists may be beneficial. Finally, this study aimed to discover if gifted readers engage in bibliotherapy without an element of guided discussion following the completion of a novel.

### **Research Considerations**

There are several important considerations to remember during this study. Bibliotherapy is firmly rooted in the past, with very little theorizing or refinement in the field since the 1990s. Therefore, most of the research referenced is from the 1940-2000s. Shrodes (1949) incorporated *imaginative literature* as a new way to explore bibliotherapy, allowing for future iterations and the division between clinical and developmental bibliotherapy. Additionally, Halstead (1988, 2009) refined her work over time to address the needs of gifted readers in preschool through high school. Another consideration is the dearth of information on gifted adults. The literature is predominantly about gifted youth, and they remain the focus of gifted literature and studies. Very few studies or literature exist specifically for gifted adults, but many practices for children

and adolescents resonate. Nonetheless, since participants reflected over their lifespan, it is appropriate to include information for gifted youth.

Finally, the novels studied and provided to students in traditional K-12 education school system perpetuates whitestream (Grande, 2003). The conventional literary canon includes the important, influential, and definitive works of eras in literature. This canon is the collective idea of the books a person should have exposure to achieve a well-rounded education. However, this canon has been under attack for decades for perpetuating the thoughts of primarily white men (Shaw, 1994). There is a call for more diversity and inclusion in literature at all levels (We Need Diverse Books, 2023). In this research study, participants discussed their high school required reading and their identities as readers; sometimes these intersect and sometimes they do not. Regardless, the bulk of the literature shared and examined falls outside of the realm of the traditional canon.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

There are advantages to a qualitative interview process, as they are exploratory and probe into areas where there is little knowledge and new understandings are desirable (Billups, 2021). Interviews served as an opportunity to understand participants in a detailed manner in a natural setting with diverse perspectives (Billups, 2021). Interviews provided an opportunity for immediate follow-up and allowed for observable actions, such as nonverbal behaviors and cues (Billups, 2021). Interviews also provided an opportunity for interactions and efforts to create meaning (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). However, there are also limitations to interviews. They can take time for participants to feel comfortable with the researcher, and there must be



cooperation (Billups, 2021). Interviewees may be hesitant to be truthful or transparent (Billups, 2021). There may be a breakdown in communication between the researcher and the participant; they may each use unfamiliar terminology that can skew meaning and comprehension (Billups, 2021). Additionally, the interview technique may be flawed, allowing an opportunity to compromise the quality of the data (Billups, 2021).

There may be opportunities for implicit bias during an interview exchange. This bias could be due to personal background, cultural differences, or the location of the interview might put one participant at a disadvantage (Billups, 2021). In addition, respondents might not understand the question, so their responses might be vague or disconnected, or they may alter their answers to address what the respondent thinks the interviewer wants to hear (Billups, 2021). Interviews also have a potential bias when the researcher slants the research to their audience or viewpoint (Billups, 2021). Finally, researchers may express dislike covertly or overtly, which can impact the interview outcomes (Billups, 2021). These items will be offset with my explicit effort to listen, leaving space for respondents to share their stories in their own way and using probes to allow for examples and details to be ascertained.

The delimitations include a smaller sample size and a common geographic location. The participants were allowed to self-select into the study. The Pikes Peak Association for Gifted Students (PPAGS) has a moderately small reach in the Pikes Peak region in Colorado. However, the Pikes Peak region is heavily populated with military bases, so there are a wide variety of persons from different backgrounds. Therefore, I attempted to have a broad pool of diverse participants in age, gender, and ethnicity. In

addition, snowball sampling allowed participants to refer others to the study. Participants ended up all being well-educated, most of them with advanced degrees. However, high education was not an exclusionary element.

### **Methodology of Study**

Portraiture was used as a methodology, as it allowed me, as the researcher, to bring my expertise to the research. As a gifted adult with a Bachelor's degree in English, my experiences worked in a "duet" between the research and the researcher (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). I attempted to find the essence of a person's reading journey through portraiture. The portraits reflect them as readers, which in turn is bibliotherapy, along with how they use those novels to better understand themselves and others. I hope I conveyed authority, wisdom, and perspective through the portraits of gifted readers (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Portraiture aims to make the participants feel seen, recognized, appreciated, respected, and scrutinized (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Portraits allowed the discovery of participants; there is an inherent generosity in the process through careful investigation (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Portraiture created documents of "inquiry *and* intervention, hopefully reading toward new understanding and insights, as well as instigating change" (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 5). The portraits should create a convincing and authentic experience, with subtle details of human expression present.

Portraiture asks the researcher to look for an "expression of goodness" (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 9). This attempt is present in the portraits

presented, as they are thorough and rigorous but without judgment. Portraits are written from an outsider's perspective from an insider's understanding (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). My own experiences will be evident, but as a portraitist, my opinions should not overshadow those of the actors—my voice and experience will be in harmony or work as a counterpoint to the research findings. I hope that the reader will see themselves reflected in the portraits and that the reader will discover the resonant themes through specific details in the portraits.

### **Summary**

The use of bibliotherapy to meet the affective needs of gifted adults was explored in this study. There is a gap in the research around bibliotherapy without an element of discussion. The research explored whether gifted adults used bibliotherapy to meet their socioemotional needs. The research was conducted through interviews, which were coded and interpreted through the lens of the bibliotherapeutic process along with resonant themes (Lightfoot-Lawrence & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The portraiture methodology was used to glean gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy by creating individual portraits of each participant and their experiences with literature over their lifespan.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

Bibliotherapy is a nuanced practice. First, there is no commonly accepted definition of bibliotherapy, which divided how and to whom bibliotherapy is offered. Second, bibliotherapy has been practiced in many forms since the Middle Ages. In the 1700s through the early 1900s, bibliotherapy was mainly used for institutions (viz., an establishment for practicing medicine). Typically, this form of bibliotherapy was completed with a doctor and librarian working together to address areas of concern for a patient. The field of bibliotherapy was changed with Shrodes' (1949) seminal work, wherein she argued that imaginal literature could be used for bibliotherapy. Two decades later, bibliotherapy would be divided into clinical and developmental bibliotherapy with working definitions, including guided discussion to work through the bibliotherapeutic process. Frasier & McCannon (1981) encouraged gifted education to incorporate bibliotherapy to address affective needs. Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller (1989) encouraged gifted educators to use biographies for gifted students to address affective needs. Most contemporary literature in gifted bibliotherapy continues to refer to these influential texts and philosophies presented within. This literature review progresses from the conceptual framework of the bibliotherapeutic process to the nuances of gifted individuals, concluding with an examination of bibliotherapy and the resonating power of literature.

## **Conceptual Framework: The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

The conceptual framework for the study is Halstead's (2009) *The Bibliotherapeutic Process*, see Figure 1. The bibliotherapeutic process comprises four elements that have evolved. Shrodes (1949) originated the first three elements: identification, catharsis, and insight, which parallel the dynamic processes of psychotherapy. Shrodes (1949) discussed how identification, catharsis, and insight are interconnected. Slavson (1950) added universalization. Halstead (1988, 2009) has gone on to refine these four elements, and she is often referenced in gifted literature for how individuals should progress through the process. For this reason, Halstead's (2009) bibliotherapeutic process served two functions in this study. It served as the conceptual framework for the study, grounding the research through this lens and the lens through which the interviews were coded.

Halstead (2009)'s bibliotherapeutic process includes *Identification*, the idea that a reader identifies with a character in the book, connects with a particular characteristic, and cares about the character. Identification can also occur through an experience in the book that results in emotion (Shrodes, 1949). This identification provides relief that the reader has similar problems to other people. Identification can also work by connecting the reader to a "villain, bad parents, or an unfaithful partner in the story. He therewith vicariously expresses these traits with varying degrees of relief" (Shrodes, 1949, p. 17). Identification can be either a conscious or unconscious connection with a character; it can also supplement the self-esteem of a reader (Shrodes, 1949). Identification can create a

need to imitate what is read (Shrodes, 1949). Identification can also create opportunities for projection or introjection (Shrodes, 1949).

*Catharsis* allows the reader to follow the character as they reach a successful resolution through a difficult journey. Sisk (1982) reminds us that catharsis is only possible when the literature offers solutions to problems the reader can relate to, such as anxieties, aspirations, and goals. Shrodes (1949) used catharsis synonymously with abreaction or the uncensored and spontaneous release of emotion. This can also be a purging of emotions (Shrodes, 1949).

*Insight* occurs when the reader can apply the character's situation to her life<sup>2</sup>. Halstead (2009) notes that this does not always happen during reading but can happen during reflection; specifically, "She may transfer her understanding of the character's personality and motivations to herself, increasing self-understanding and bring her own options into sharper focus" (p. 113-114). Insight does not mean immediate action, as a reader may need to contemplate. Instead, insight can show her motivations and those of others, providing an opportunity for catharsis (Shrodes, 1949). Insight can also provide opportunities for reflection and reliving previous experiences and the consequent catharsis (Shrodes, 1949). Finally, insight can also create a sense of belongingness for the reader, primarily if the reader identifies with the character (Shrodes, 1949).

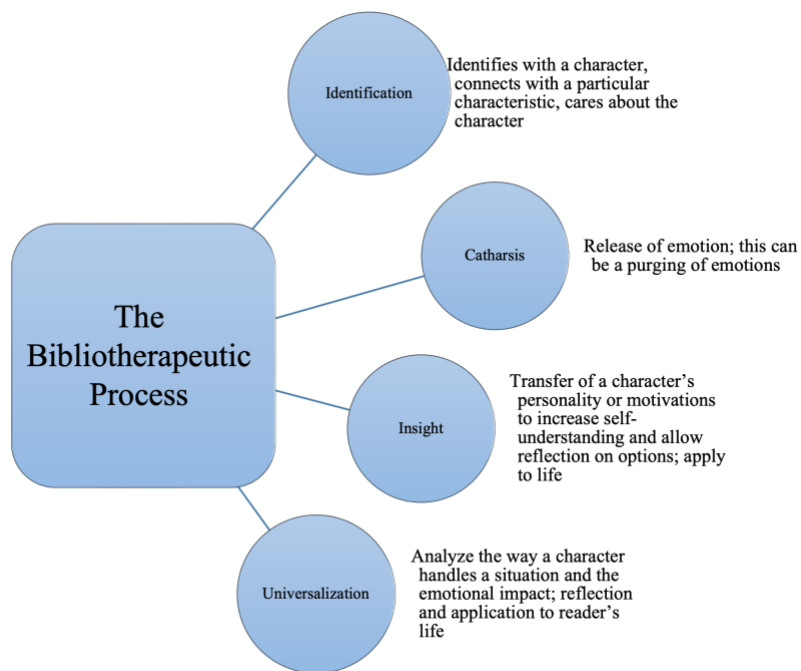
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<sup>2</sup> The researcher will be using feminine gender when writing for simplicity unless directly writing about a man; this connects with the methodology of portraiture, wherein I am an active participant in the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

*Universalization* is a connection to the universal experience of the book. This combines with a realization and understanding that their difficulties are not their alone. Halstead (2009) shared that from experience, the reader could analyze “the critical situation, the way the story character handled it, and the feelings stirred in the readers in response; and finally on ways in which all of this relates to the reader’s own life” (p. 114). Of course, not all readers will have a universalization experience, but it can profoundly impact those who do.

**Figure 1**

*The Bibliotherapeutic Process*



Maladaptive concerns are also associated with the bibliotherapeutic process (Shrodes, 1949). If the reader identifies with an unadmirable character or if the character unrealistically handles problems, that can create a deterrent for the reader (Shrodes,

1949). If the reader resonates with a character they feel is like a person in their life, they may try to use the character to seek the insight of that individual, which could be unrealistic (Shrodes, 1949). The reader may also use a character as a scapegoat to ignore their motives and challenges (Shrodes, 1949).

The element of discussion was prevalent as a situation to allow a gifted reader to work through the four steps outlined above (Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Delisle, 1990; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 1991; Hébert & Furner, 1997; Jeon 1992; Newton, 1995). However, what happens with the dozens of books gifted readers read without guided discussion? Do we assume they do not complete the bibliotherapeutic process independently, whether they use the words or not?

### **Gifted, Reading, and Gifted Reader Definitions**

The definition of the gifted is not unified and ranges from different philosophies and by state. The Columbus Group's (1991) definition asserted, "Giftedness is asynchronous development in which cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different from the norm" (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015, p. 15). This definition includes the idea of asynchrony, which can be prevalent among gifted individuals. This often presents itself in a variety of socioemotional ways. The Marland Report (1972) definition indicated gifted children "require differentiated educational program and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program to realize their contributions to self and society" (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015, p. 14). Giftedness comes in many forms, as stated in the Marland Report, and intensity and asynchrony also uniquely shape a gifted person's



identity. This definition includes an element of contribution to self, allowing an individual to understand the differences within gifted individuals and how that impacts their place in the world.

Finally, in Colorado, the Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA) defined giftedness in the following way:

Those persons between the ages of four and twenty-one whose aptitude or competence in abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment in one or more domains are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Gifted children are hereafter referred to as gifted students. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special educational services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e., twice exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness:

General or specific intellectual ability, Specific academic aptitude, Creative or productive thinking, Leadership abilities, Visual arts, performing arts, musical or psychomotor abilities. (Colorado Department of Education, 2021, para. 1)

This definition of giftedness is expansive and includes a variety of elements. It is important to note that this definition consists of various gifted domains and additional exceptionalities. This definition delineates that gifted students are capable of exceptional learning, which may surpass a typical setting.

Reading in 2023 comes in all forms, though there is a discussion about what constitutes reading. We are beyond the only option being written text on paper. This study defines reading as "the practice of using text to create meaning" (Johnson, 2008). Gifted readers read voraciously, have large and unusual vocabularies, often read before school, and perform above their peers (Clark, 2013; Halstead, 2009; Kerr & McKay, 2014). Kerr and McKay (2014) cautioned not to disregard precocious reading, which may

be more than just decoding or memorization. Gifted readers are those with exceptional ability in reading and using textual information (Mason & Au, 1990, as cited in Levande, 1999). These children often have advanced language and speak in complex and complicated sentences (Bond & Bond, 1983, as cited in Levande, 1999).

### **Metacognition**

Metacognition is not exclusive to gifted learners but is an integral part of thinking and reflecting about learning for everyone. Cheng (1993) described metacognition as the process of “thinking about one’s own learning, remembering, and understanding” (p. 105). This process comprises two parts: “individual’s knowledge about their own cognitive resources about task demands, and about strategies to perform a cognitive task effectively. ... Another important component of metacognition is the executive control, or regulation of cognition” (Cheng, 1993, p. 105). Thus, metacognition allows a person to understand their learning process and adjust their cognitive process to finish a task effectively. The combined knowledge and control of cognition are the essential elements of metacognition.

Gifted individuals typically process information efficiently and are problem solvers. Sisk (1982) echoed, “Gifted children are capable of higher levels of thinking at an earlier age than their peers” (p. 223). This earlier thinking allows them to process complex topics and learn reflexively. Cheng (1993) agreed that gifted individuals could be

introspective in their thinking about learning processes. They can be encouraged to generate and evaluate alternative solutions to problems encountered in daily life and school settings. Furthermore, guidance may be provided in such a way that gifted students can internalize for self-regulated learning. (p. 105)

This ability to be introspective, generate, and evaluate through metacognition leads to different types of understanding. Common traits of gifted learners are good short-term memory and fast processing times. Davidson (1986) asserted that there is a combination of understanding gifted insight using three processes: selective encoding, selective combination, and selective comparison. It is through these processes which interact continually with each other and with new information. These three processes interact continually with each other and with new information. In this way, gifted individuals may be able to learn, remember, and understand all on their own.

### **Affective Needs**

Not only do gifted children experience the same problems as other children, but they also have distinctive problems stemming from their giftedness (Frasier & McCannon, 1981). Gifted people have a variety of idiosyncrasies that are often related to giftedness, such as “sensitivity, intensity, perceptiveness, overexcitabilities, divergent thinking, precocious talent development, advanced moral development” (NAGC, 2009). These affective needs are essential to the overall well-being of gifted students. Sisk (1982) discussed supersensitivity, unrealistic expectations and goals, perfectionism, and keen reflections on perceived inadequacies and different vulnerabilities. Kline and Meckstroth (1985) shared that gifted children have “tremendous positive potential; but it is also counter-balanced by a great potential for sadness, depression, sensitivity and awareness of inequity” (p. 26). This asynchrony can create potential hardships as gifted children and adults navigate the world.

**Table 1***Affective Needs of Gifted Learners*

<i>Socioemotional Characteristic</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Anxiety	Mendaglio (2016): “Researchers have identified several general sources of anxiety in children. These sources include genetics, child temperament, parent-child early attachment, parental disapproval and/or criticism, and parental anxiety. ... <i>giftedness</i> in itself can be another source of anxiety: Heightened sensitivity, which indicates a greater awareness of the physical, social, and intrapersonal environments. ... Analytical attitude is a gifted individual’s propensity to question, evaluate, and judge everything and everyone they encounter. ... Self-criticism may also be a source of anxiety” (pp. 14-15).
Depression	Neihart (2012): “The hallmark of depression in children, whether gifted or not, is irritability and the loss of interest in once pleasurable activities ... Most important to keep in mind with gifted students who are depressed is that their functioning may be normal [but] ... requiring much more effort” (pp. 620-621).
Overexcitabilities	Daniels and Piechowski (2008): “innate tendency to respond in an intensified manner to various forms of stimuli, both external and internal” (p. 8). The areas include: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional.
Perfectionism	Greenspon (2012): “the desire for perfection (not near perfection), plus the fear of imperfection and the concern that one will not be acceptable” (p. 602).

Social Isolation	Hyatt and Cross (2009): “The tragic results of being different, not fitting in, having different interests, concerns, and values, dressing differently, and not meeting the cultural expectations for normality often include social isolation and being bullied” (p. 564).
Underachievement	Siegle (2013): “discrepancy between potential (expected performance), often measured by a test, and achievement (actual performance), often measured by achievement tests or school grades” (p. 9).

Cornett and Cornett (1980) discussed the power of bibliotherapy concerning affective areas, including empathy, relieving emotional pressure, positive attitudes and self-image, discovering new interests, promoting tolerance, respect, and seeing the good in others. Halstead (2009) clarified:

bibliotherapy is seen specifically as a way of helping gifted and talented children understand and cope with growing up different in a world that is geared to the average. It can be used to help them anticipate difficulties, as well as give them a basis for self-understanding when they feel alone and misunderstood or when they are reluctant to use their abilities because it is not popular to be smart. (p. 107)

Bibliotherapy allows for self-concept so they can learn from others how to persevere through internal and external pressures. Sousa (2009) asserted the process of developmental bibliotherapy can help individuals through reading and discussion. The components include a book, a reader, and a leader. This process should help the reader identify with characters’ emotions and life lessons and then apply these concepts to their

lives. All of these scholars still retain the idea that bibliotherapy must be completed in conjunction with discussion.

Bibliotherapy is often discussed as an intervention to meet gifted individuals' unique needs and challenges (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2011; Pfeiffer, 2012; Pfeiffer & Burko, 2016; VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009). Literature provides an opportunity for exposure to human weakness and how to accept and care for it (Halstead, 2009). Pfeiffer (2012) stated that bibliotherapy could be a viable precautionary strategy for gifted students and their parents. VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) discussed that some issues for bibliotherapy include decision-making, identity development, emotional intelligence, social problems, and multiculturalism (VanTassel-Baska et al., 2009).

Galbraith and Delisle (2015) asserted that bibliotherapy allows students, through guided reading, to “understand themselves and their environment, build self-esteem, meet the developmental challenges of adolescence, and form coping skills” (p. 105). Likewise, Hébert (2011) considered bibliotherapy as a way to use literature to help young people cope with problems and understand themselves. Hébert (2011) also shared:

Literature can help young people appreciate their emotional sensitivity and intensity. Good books can help them develop more realistic self-expectations. For others, a book's message regarding the role of resilience in overcoming adversity may be helpful. In addition to supporting these characteristics, other developmental issues such as establishing and maintaining friendships, dealing with parental and teacher expectations, determining healthy self-expectations, and coping with peer pressure concerns. (p. 74)

Consequently, using the bibliotherapeutic processes through literature can have powerful yet varied effects on readers.

## *Anxiety*

Furmack et al. (2009) examined internet-delivered self-help bibliotherapy with therapist guidance and unguided self-help bibliotherapy to assist with social anxiety disorder. The results yielded that both were successful. Pure bibliotherapy had significant, reliable effects and was in line with those who had bibliotherapy with a therapist and online discussion forum. Furmack et al. (2009) concluded: “bibliotherapy without therapist input can lead to substantial long-lasting improvement, especially when supported with an online discussion group” (p. 447).

Gregory et al. (2004) used a meta-analysis of 29 outcome studies of cognitive forms of bibliotherapy for depression for therapists. Seventeen studies had stronger research designs (pretest-posttest waiting list control group) with a reputable effect size. Gregor et al. (2004) discussed the clinically relevant questions about cognitive bibliotherapy for depression, why practitioners may consider the use, which individuals would benefit from, and how professionals can structure their patient care.

## *Depression*

Weisz and Kazdin (2017) discussed cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT) and that bibliotherapy is a “low-cost and readily available alternative intervention that has achieved a strong level of support for both depression treatment and prevention in adults” (p. 60). Weisz and Kazdin (2017) discussed that using bibliotherapy for depression treatment in adolescents has very little research.

Cross et al. (2009) discussed using bibliotherapy to help students connect to similarly troubled characters. According to Cross et al. (2009), students can use these

novels to understand “they are not the only one with those problems, gain insights into their problems by analyzing the difficulties of a fictional character, or reduce their anxieties and tensions by vicariously sharing the feelings of a character” (p. 338). Cross et al. (2009) shared that this can only be facilitated in a classroom with a welcoming culture of respect and understanding. Teachers should be aware of their limitations and should err on the side of caution when dealing with potentially suicidal gifted students by not overlooking potential signs of distress. Delisle (1990) also explored the connection between gifted adolescents and suicide prevention. Delisle (1990) discussed that gifted children are “children first, gifted second” (p. 16) and that they are equally at risk as their peers. Delisle (1990) discussed that bibliotherapy, positive self-talk, and self-concept activities could be helpful with to address suicide prevention.

### ***Overexcitabilities***

Overexcitabilities (OE) were discovered through the research of Dabrowski as he explored his Theory of Positive Disintegration (TPD) (Daniels & Piechowski, 2009). TPD is based on the idea that an initial or primitive integration goes through a sequence of disintegrations (e.g., crises or conflicts) that ultimately result in higher integration and personality development. OEs are anchored in the nervous system but are seen as an above-average response to stimuli; these are hereditary and genetic traits a person is born with. OEs cause a person to experience life more intensely and profoundly and come in five forms—typically, a person has all five, but a couple stands out more—psychomotor, sensual, imaginal, intellectual, and emotional.



Burke (2009) reminded gifted children in grieving positions might need extra support because of their intensities and overexcitabilities (OE). These children might be more in tune with what others are feeling and have a higher level of empathy and more profound compassion (Burke, 2009). Thus, it is crucial to meet their unique socioemotional needs when gifted children are grieving from death, divorce, illness, or abuse. Burke (2009) advocated for bibliotherapy to meet their needs in these moments.

Harrison and Van Haneghan (2011) explored a connection between overexcitabilities and the correlation to insomnia, death anxiety, and fear of the unknown. Their study involved 73 gifted and 143 typical middle and high school students; they were given the Overexcitabilities Questionnaire II, and death anxiety questionnaire, and scales in fear and insomnia. Higher levels of OE in gifted students resulted in higher anxiety and insomnia (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011). Harrison and Van Haneghan (2011) encourage the use of socioemotional development using bibliotherapy to meet their needs. Harrison and Van Haneghan (2011) also make some connections to OEs and insomnia, death anxiety, and fear of the unknown. Psychomotor and sensual are connected to insomnia for gifted individuals (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011). Intellectual OE “may have a correlation to insomnia, fear of the unknown, and/or death anxiety” (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011, p. 673). Avid reading, deep curiosity, and a love of learning can also be tied to intellectual overexcitability (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011). The results indicated that imaginal and emotional OE and giftedness had significant relationships to insomnia (Harrison & Van Haneghan, 2011). The emotional OE had a significant connection to death anxiety (Harrison & Van

Haneghan, 2011). Harrison and Van Haneghan (2011) reported that gifted students have a higher fear of the unknown and more insomnia; additionally, gifted students have higher anxiety levels after accounting for higher levels of OE.

### ***Perfectionism***

Nugent (2000) discussed that though perfectionism is not limited to gifted individuals, research shows that gifted children and adults are more susceptible. Nugent (2000) considered that because of gifted heightened abilities, sensitivity, and awareness, teachers could use bibliotherapy to address some negative manifestations of perfectionism and other areas of concern. Nugent (2000) discussed using bibliotherapy to address perfectionism, suicide, and the expectations of others. She also discussed embedding humor to discuss the consequences of disabling perfectionism through bibliotherapeutic means (Nugent, 2000). The final connection between perfectionism and bibliotherapy is eating disorders and physical perfection (Nugent, 2000).

Van Gemert (2018/2019) explored perfectionism from a gifted lens. She discussed both the maladaptive strategies perfectionists employed and shared coping strategies. The coping strategies include modeling dealing with stress, encouraging social support, cultivating and valuing work, mental contrasting (looking at the positive end result while being aware of the current challenges), positive reinterpretation, and reassurance of worth. Van Gemert (2018/2019) also referenced Vilfredo Pareto's principle, where 80% of the benefits will derive from 20% of the investment, which Van Gemert asserts can be applied to school, work, money, and relationships. The end question for her application of this principle is, "Are the things I'm doing now really

helping me, or am I spending the most time and effort on things that matter least?” (Van Gemert, 2018/2019, p. 216).

### ***Social Isolation***

Isolation can be commonly linked to gifted individuals, as their intellect prevents them from fitting in. The feeling of isolation gifted individuals may feel because of their differentness can harm their well-being (Cross & Cross, 2015). Szymanski and Wrenn (2019) examined the intensities of five gifted adults and their development journey. Several themes emerged through the study, including isolation, hyperawareness, and finding peers. According to Szymanski and Wrenn (2019), these feelings can be extremely pronounced in K-12 experiences and remain through adulthood. Szymanski and Wrenn’s (2019) findings showed societal pressure to hide their intensity from OEs. However, participants could judge their behavior based on internal understandings of who they were. Szymanski and Wrenn (2019) conducted a background questionnaire before interviews and semi-structured interviews. Their participants were all Caucasian but were both male and female and ranged from their 20s to their 60s with various educational completion (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). The participants all realized from a young age they were different; some shared an awareness of beauty, others a sense of responsibility and a sense of sadness about tragic events (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). According to Szymanski and Wrenn (2019):

The awareness of being different from others due to advanced cognitive ability and their intensities led to feelings of isolation in all of the participants. These feelings were extremely pronounced in their K–12 experiences and remained throughout adulthood. The societal pressure to control OEs sent the message that the intensities are negative and their behaviors must be harnessed or hidden. (p. 252)

This feeling of isolation existed within their families, and among participants, therapy, reading, and illegal drugs were common (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). There was some relief when participants could find *true peers* or those like them, and intelligence was essential (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). The participants pursued their passions and interests and did not see it as a sacrifice but allowed them to live more satisfying lives (Szymanski & Wrenn, 2019). Szymanski and Wrenn (2019) concluded that the need to be with others like them could be met through face-to-face or virtual gatherings, bibliotherapy, and extracurricular activities.

### ***Underachievement***

Underachievement is when a person performs academically below their tested abilities (Delisle, 2017). These individuals can also be what Delisle (2017) coined as *selective consumers* or those who are picky about what they will and will not complete. Determining the root cause of underachievement is important in supporting those individuals (Delisle, 2017). Bibliotherapy is recommended to address the affective needs of gifted underachievers (Delisle, 2017; Hébert, 1995; Newton, 1995). Hébert (1995) related the use of bibliotherapy to help four gifted young men. Their interactions with the biographies recommended to them by their counselor helped them better understand themselves through the bibliotherapeutic process (Hébert, 1995). Hébert (1995) discussed how books are used to address personal problems and develop skills that will make them successful in life, build positive self-concept, and, if used correctly, can change values, thinking, attitudes, and personality. Specifically, Hébert (1995) addressed that young men need opportunities to be introspective and address their emotionality, but societal

expectations inhibit those opportunities. Therefore, bright young men may feel comfortable using a third-person approach to dealing with these issues (Hébert, 1995; Hébert, 2009).

Long and Erwin (2020) used the Achievement Orientation Model (AOM), Maker Model, and Bibliotherapy for Year 7 (13-year-old) and Year 9 (15-year-old) underachieving students. The objectives were to increase self-efficacy, become more self-regulated, and increase motivation (Long & Erwin, 2000). Long and Erwin (2000) found that identification as an underachiever was enough to inspire students to see themselves with the potential to achieve academically. That motivation is a critical element of achievement. Long and Erwin (2000) also found that the abstractness of bibliotherapy made it difficult, but students were still successful in using it in tangent with the Maker Model. Therefore, long & Erwin (2000) encourage using bibliotherapy as a strategy, specifically employing *Lives and Living*, a strategy in the Maker Model, to make bibliotherapy easier to use.

## **Bibliotherapy**

### ***Definition***

The definition of bibliotherapy has evolved since the practice first began. The first definition appeared in Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary in 1941, "the employment of books and the reading of them in the treatment of nervous diseases" (Rubin, 1978). Tews (1962) shared the first definition of bibliotherapy in "*Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1961) and the definition there is: 'bibliotherapy: the use of selected reading materials as therapeutic adjuvants in medicine and

psychiatry; also: guidance in the solution of personal problems through directed reading” (p. 99). This definition has slightly evolved; Merriam-Webster (n.d.) currently defines bibliotherapy, “the use of reading materials for help in solving personal problems or for psychiatric therapy; *also*: the reading materials so used.” The common theme amongst all definitions is that reading serves as a tool to help solve personal problems, and each definition does not include discussion.

Bibliotherapy is defined in alternative ways by different researchers. For example, Lenkowsky (1987) described it as using reading to induce affective change and personal growth and development. Lundsteen (1972) defined bibliotherapy as “getting the right book to the right child at the right time about the right problem” (p. 505). The lack of a common definition and what should be incorporated in bibliotherapy led to ambiguity in the field, which is later discussed in the challenges section.

### ***History and Bibliotherapy Theorists***

The history of bibliotherapy grew out of a concept for clinicians to meet the needs of their patients. The first acknowledgment that books can meet affective needs comes from the library in Alexandria, founded around 300 BC; the epigraph reads: “Medicine [or remedy] for The Mind” (Jack & Ronan, 2008, p. 162). Books were used in the Middle Ages to cope with mental and physical ailments, with the earliest record of using books to heal in 1272 (Jack & Ronan, 2008). Bibliotherapy in the 18th century in Europe was more institutionalized, and in the 19th century, it reached the United States. Jack and Ronan (2008) reported that “In 1802, Dr. Benjamin Rush was among the first Americans

to recommend reading as part of a medical patient's treatment plan" (p. 164). In 1937, Dr. William Menninger became one of the first to theorize that clinical bibliotherapy is a treatment method and that a physician and librarian were responsible for a treatment plan through didactic material (Jack & Ronan, 2008). The next theorist was Alice Bryan (1939, as cited in Jack & Ronan, 2008), who developed six objectives of clinical bibliotherapy:

(1) to show the reader they are not the first to have the problem; (2) to permit the reader to see that more than one solution is possible; (3) to help the reader see the basic motivations of people (including themselves) involved in a particular situation; (4) to help the reader see the values involved in experience in human terms; (5) to provide facts needed for the solution of a problem and (6) to encourage the reader to face their situation realistically. (p. 167)

Many of Bryan's objectives indicate the power of literature to expand beyond one's personal experiences. However, it is essential to note that none of these objectives directly state that an element of discussion is required.

Dr. Louis A. Gottschalk (1948, as cited in Jack & Ronan, 2008) had his understanding of how to use clinical bibliotherapy:

presented six benefits of prescribed, supervised reading by a trained therapist. ... The six benefits were as follows: (1) increasing the understanding of their own psychological and physiological reactions to frustrations and conflict; (2) increase understanding of some of the terminology used so that communication between the therapist and patient may be facilitated; (3) support the verbalization of problems which they ordinarily find difficult; (4) stimulate thinking constructively between therapy sessions and to analyse further their attitudes and behaviour patterns; (5) reinforce, by precept and example, social and cultural patterns and inhibit infantile patterns of behaviour and (6) stimulation of imagination, afford vicarious satisfactions or enlarge the patient's sphere of interests. (p. 175)

Some of these benefits formulated by Gottschalk (1948) remain true when bibliotherapy is written with a developmental lens and adapted to educational use.

The final prominent theorist in bibliotherapy was Carolyn Shrodes (1949), who developed a theoretical model that people are greatly influenced by characters with whom they identify in stories. Shrodes (1949) examined the inclusion of imaginative literature instead of just didactic literature in meeting the needs of clinical patients in psychology, psychiatry, and those hospitalized. Shrodes' (1949) background as a college educator also prompted her to realize that there could be a natural opportunity for bibliotherapy to be used in educational settings—both guidance centers and classrooms. Shrodes (1949) examined how literature works as a tool for interaction between the personality of the reader and the literature as a means to address personality appraisal, adjustment, and growth in a psychological field. She then examined the dynamic process through which imaginative literature acts to form an affective experience for the reader, creating a moment of identification, projection, and catharsis. Finally, Shrodes (1949) shared how reading can modify and change a person and provide an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between conscious and unconscious thought processes, providing an opportunity for areas of a personality to be latent and overt, thus changing the way an individual perceives their world and changing their personality.

Shrodes (1949) explored the connection between emotional experiences and how those can counteract previous experiences. She examined how imaginative literature can allow a reader the opportunity further to explore themselves and others through the power of literature. Shrodes (1949) discussed that imaginative literature could pave the way for therapy where therapeutic gains can occur. Shrodes (1949) discussed identification, projection, catharsis, and insight as being involved in the aesthetic process and paralleling



the phases of psychotherapy. Shrodes' (1949) case study showed literature reveals underlying subtleties of personality but how it can also provide opportunities for restructuring a reader's personality. Shrodes (1949) shared how literature can change a reader, especially in a clinical setting.

It is important to note that until this point in history, bibliotherapy was practiced at a clinical level, with a librarian providing book recommendations and typically some level of discussion (Shrodes, 1949; Tews, 1962). These book selections were either specifically selected to aid in treating a patient with a doctor, or the book could be randomly chosen to evoke discussions. These books were typically didactic in nature and avoided controversial or emotional topics (Shrodes, 1949; Tews, 1962). Shrodes (1949) research opened the field with the inclusion of imaginative literature. In response, from the mid-1940s through the 1960s, bibliotherapy literature expands beyond fields other than clinicians, such as psychologists and psychiatrists. Tews (1970, as cited in Jack & Ronan, 2008) reported that in the 1950s and 1960s that those writing about bibliotherapy were educators, counselors, psychologists, and social workers. In 1962, a *Library Trends* issue was dedicated entirely to bibliotherapy through different professions (Tews, 1962). In 1964, the American Library Association (ALA) had a three-day workshop attended by educators and other professions (Horne, 1975, as cited in Jack & Ronan, 2008). Following the workshop, "the consensus conclusion that there were three major requisites for bibliotherapy to develop as a field: (1) bibliotherapy training courses [i.e., skills required], (2) outcome research and (3) a standard nomenclature" (Tews, 1970, as cited in

Jack & Ronan, 2008, p. 170). After the ALA workshop, a division is solidified in bibliotherapy around the inclusion of discussion.

### *A Division in Practice*

Clinical bibliotherapy began in a hospital setting. Initially, bibliotherapy was a team affair with a physician, psychologist, librarian, nurse, and occupational therapist, each with a role to play. At the time, clinical bibliotherapy was administered at hospitals and institutions (Tews, 1962). Tews (1962) stated that bibliotherapy occurs when reading materials are “planned, conducted, and controlled as treatment under the physician’s guidance for emotional and other problems. It must be administered by a skilled, professionally trained librarian within the prescribed purpose and goals” (p. 99). Tews (1962) added that the librarian or nurse must pay close attention to the patient’s reactions and responses and report to the physician for “interpretation, evaluation, and directions in follow-up” (p. 99). Tews (1962) wrote exclusively about using bibliotherapy as a clinical practice and those librarians support through the selection of literature.

Following the ALA workshop, Zaccaria and Moses (1968), two educational psychologists, published a book for using bibliotherapy as a therapeutic medium for teachers and counselors to address student mental health. Moses and Zaccaria (1969) then published ten principles for managing educational bibliotherapy, which became definitive concerning gifted education and educational bibliotherapy. These principles become a code or doctrine for how bibliotherapy will function in education for the next fifty years. Moses and Zaccaria (1969) proclaimed:

*Principle I:* Understand the nature and dynamics of bibliotherapy incorporating the theoretical aspects of bibliotherapy into a functional theory. *Principle II:*

Possess at least a general familiarity with the literature which the student will use. *Principle III:* Bibliotherapeutic reading can be encouraged through the use of prompting techniques. *Principle IV:* Readiness is an important factor to be kept in mind when considering the utilization of bibliotherapeutic techniques. *Principle V:* Books should be suggested rather than prescribed. *Principle VI:* The practitioner should be sensitive to physical handicaps of the individual which may dictate the necessity of using special types of reading materials. *Principle VII:* Bibliotherapy appears to be most effective with individuals of average and above-average reading ability. *Principle VIII:* The reading of the literature by the individual should be accompanied or followed up by discussion and counseling. *Principle IX:* Bibliotherapy is an adjunct to other types of helping relationships. *Principle X:* Although bibliotherapy is a useful technique it is not a panacea. (pp. 402-404)

The principles Moses and Zaccaria (1969) outlined structure how educational and developmental bibliotherapy is used indefinitely. Many of these principles are straightforward and would positively adapt to any scholarly setting. Moses and Zaccaria (1969) seemed to be priming bibliotherapy for gifted education with principle seven, as gifted readers have above-average reading ability. Although, principle eight, the requirement of discussion or counseling, has the longest-reaching impact on gifted individuals and bibliotherapy.

### ***The Element of Discussion in Bibliotherapy***

Discussion has played a key role in bibliotherapy since its inception. Moses and Zaccaria's (1969) principle eight, a required element of discussion following reading, created lasting restrictions on how bibliotherapy is viewed in the realm of education and developmental bibliotherapy. Rubin (1978) divided bibliotherapy into three classifications: clinical, developmental, and institutional, which were dependent on participants, settings, and leaders. Rubin (1978) defined clinical bibliotherapy for clients with emotional or behavioral problems with goals ranging from change in behavior to

insight. Rubin (1978) explained developmental bibliotherapy for *normal* individuals with both imaginative and didactic literature with goals ranging from self-actualization to preserving mental health. Institutional bibliotherapy would be completed while a patient is institutionalized or in a hospital to address a diagnosis that would not allow a patient to remain at home for a given period of time or indefinitely. Rubin (1978) stressed that an element of discussion is key in all three types of bibliotherapy.

Rhea (1979) asserted that the 1970s were a *Me Decade* because of the popularity of self-actualization and self-analysis. Rhea (1979) also contended that self-help or popular psychology books have “proliferated; many have become unexpected bestsellers” (p. 239). This era was the rise of self-help books. Rhea (1979) illustrated how bibliotherapy became genuinely interdisciplinary. Rhea (1979) reported, “Of the 131 articles published from 1970 to 1975, 35 percent appeared in library journals and 65 percent in periodicals of other files such as psychology, education, nursing, and occupational therapy” (p. 242). There may be a connection between the retention of an element of guided discussion and bibliotherapy as a way for clinicians to keep their patients in the clinic and out of a bookstore.

Hoagland (1972) is often cited in gifted bibliotherapeutic research as requiring an element of discussion to address bibliotherapy correctly. This is accurate, as Hoagland (1972) asserted: “Just to read a good book cannot be thought of as bibliotherapy. . . . It is important that the individual not only read books but also participate in discussions” (p. 391). This long-lasting reference to a required element of discussion remains a prevalent inclusion in the practice decades later (Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Galbraith & Delisle,

2015; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009, 2011; Jeon, 1992; Sousa, 2009). Since this initial writing, these principles have not been questioned or rewritten and remain a driving force in developmental bibliotherapy.

For instance, Hébert (2011) stressed gifted students' discussions of high-quality literature need to incorporate opportunities to share their feelings and listen closely to each other. This can create a sense that all students are connected. Hébert (2011) discussed that helping students draw parallels between main characters and their lives and providing opportunities to listen to peers as they share personal experiences is valuable. Sousa (2009) asserted the process of developmental bibliotherapy can help individuals better understand themselves and cope with their giftedness through reading and discussion. The leader should read and prepare discussions based on topics covered in the novel (Sousa, 2009). This process should help the reader identify with characters' emotions and lessons and apply them to their life (Sousa, 2009).

### ***Bibliotherapy without Discussion***

There is very little research around bibliotherapy without an element of discussion. It is under-theorized, with very little written about it, and often mentioned as a side note. Sister Mary Agnes (1947) used the term *free reading* to examine the racial attitudes of one hundred adolescent girls in a large urban Catholic high school. Though it might not be bibliotherapy in the formal sense, using a questionnaire, Agnes (1947) examined "one hundred white girls whose library cards showed that they had borrowed during the past year at least two books by or about Negroes or dealing largely with Negro life" (p. 415) and the control had no reading on that topic. Through examination of her

results, Agnes (1947) concluded that the *free readers* were more favorably disposed toward black people, their human rights, and the intricacies of their problems. Agnes (1947) reported that some novels read by the women might have had an element of “‘propagandizing’ nature” (p. 419), but she concluded the impact was more homogeneous in their responses to the questionnaire as a group. Agnes (1947) illustrated an example of individual reading and engagement through the bibliotherapeutic process to create a moment of catharsis or understanding the plight of others.

McCarty Hynes and Hynes-Berry (2012) discussed a belief regarding bibliotherapy is one wherein the healing process is through reading (McCarty Hynes & Hynes-Berry, 2012). McCarty Hynes and Hynes-Berry (2012) used *reading bibliotherapy* to describe Shrodes’ (1949) discussion of prescribing books so that the reader can engage with the content through the bibliotherapeutic process; however, they do little more than write that simple assertion. Instead, their writing focuses on the engagement of bibliotherapy with discussion.

Brewster (2009) reported subsections of bibliotherapeutic practice, including self-help, creative, and *informal bibliotherapy*. Brewster (2009) shares, “Anecdotal evidence from the research suggests that reader development work, engaging people with fiction and poetry to provide enjoyment, has a positive effect on people’s mental health and wellbeing” (p. 13) as a theory for informal bibliotherapy. Informal bibliotherapy uses the reader’s engagement to provide education, insight, and catharsis. Though, Brewster (2009) spent time discussing the power of engaging in reading groups.

Weingarten (1956) related several examples of successful interaction with novels to evoke personal growth and understanding, specifically in gifted individuals. This is the anecdotal evidence in the literature of gifted individuals engaging in bibliotherapy without discussion. In addition, Weingarten (1956) shared that “adolescents testified that through books, they had come to understand their problems” (p. 222). Thus, we see a lasting example of gifted students engaging with novels at a deep level. Weingarten (1956) asserts:

But the gifted adolescent possesses to a marked degree the tool which can aid him in the solution of his problems produced by his brightness. His intelligence can aid him in analyzing and understanding the elements of his dilemma; he has the capacity for self-diagnosis and consequently can attain the first step toward finding solutions to his problems. Since self-help is the best help, the gifted adolescent needs only initial guidance in finding the road to personality adjustment and social orientation. (p. 221)

This connects with the metacognition of gifted individuals and their ability to use literature to understand themselves and their environment better. Though this study is dated, there is a dearth of literature regarding gifted individuals using books to understand themselves and their families, friends, and the world around them without engaging in discussion.

Weingarten (1956) confirmed that gifted individuals are capable of self-help if they receive guidance. However, he did not state the form this guidance needs to take, and I, as the researcher, asserted that using literature is another form of guidance. Frasier and McCannon (1981) reiterated this concept: “the variety of reading to which his interest [leads] him—novels, biographies, dramas, poems, etc.—he will undoubtedly find clues for self-directive adjustment” (p. 82). Kerr and McKay (2014) shared how books

impact gifted women throughout their lives from preschool to adulthood, serving different functions throughout. Finally, Halstead (2009) confirmed that many gifted persons who have not been formally identified might have the same socioemotional needs as those who have. Consequently, affirming the power of literature concerning a gifted person's need to meet affective needs, whether they are officially identified or not.

### ***Gifted Readers***

Gifted students are typically avid readers (Adderholt-Elliott & Elder, 1989; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Jeon, 1992; Newton, 1995). Gifted readers often read several books at once (Halstead, 2009). Halstead (2009) argued, “knowledge, information, and new ideas are nourishment for gifted minds, and (perhaps unconsciously) they sense they are in danger of intellectual starvation without them” (p. 149). Literature can be influential in its impact on the reader, which is often so much more than absorbing the plot. Halstead (2009) shared that gifted learners can integrate what they read with what they know to create a blend of understanding through reading. This allows the reader to find their voice beyond the words on the page. According to Halstead (2009), “gifted persons are capable of comprehensive synthesis and can benefit from a rather long incubation period to integrate new ideas” (p. 152). Consequently, the ability for an incubation period makes bibliotherapy something that can be done independently.

These readers typically read for pleasure, the “rapturous, almost physical relief of getting out of the self for a few hours” (Holland, 1990). However, on the opposite end of the spectrum is a reluctant reader. If a child is not engaging with literature, Holland (1990) created The Holland Plan to turn reluctant readers into readers. She asserted a



five-step program to turn reluctant readers into avid readers. Holland (1990) shared the most important step, buying books. These should be engaging to the child, something they can relate to, and to have them easily accessible at home. She warns parents not to try to do two things at once: making reading fun and teaching them about some obsequious topic; instead, they pick interesting books. Halstead (2009) encouraged families to discover the root cause for the refusal to read and address the reason.

Though many gifted individuals enjoy reading and reading with high speed and comprehension, there can be pitfalls. The first is reading what you are not emotionally ready to read. Halstead (2009) focused on the childhood occurrence of this with children being able to decode the text (*viz.*, understand and pronounce most words, assemble meaning from sentences and paragraphs) but not ready to *comprehend* what they are decoding. For example, they may not be able to understand symbolism or the complexities of relationships explored in the text, or it may have mature content (Halstead, 2009). Adults can have a similar experience when the content is not something they are emotionally ready to engage with.

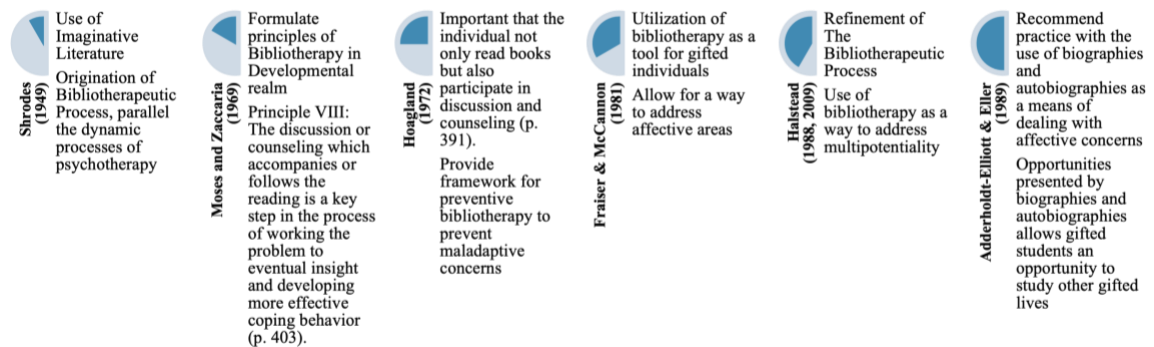
Reading can be used as a form of escape or for engagement. McKay (2014) stressed that gifted readers might find voices in books “far more interesting than her age peers” (p. 151). Halsted (2009) also addressed this concept when she shared that the time spent reading and with peers should be valued independently. In addition, reading could be a form of replenishment for depleted energy as an introvert (Halstead, 2009). A final assertion of Kerr and McKay (2014) is that we need to allow gifted girls, who are the focus of their work, the opportunity to “be best friends with books without worrying that

they won't learn social skills" (p. 374). Halstead (2009) warned if a child is reading to escape due to a lack of interpersonal skills or out of depression or fear, then there should be a form of intervention.

Gifted individuals are primed for independent bibliotherapy with their use of metacognition and ability to engage with literature at a deep level. The ability of gifted readers to integrate and synthesize what they read means that they may not need discussion to have a deep connection and understanding of the literature they read and progress through the bibliotherapeutic process. Their engagement with multiple texts simultaneously can also allow them opportunities to work through numerous concepts simultaneously or read books for different benefits simultaneously. For a summary of the seminal works in the field of bibliotherapy, please see Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Seminal Works to this Study in the Field of Bibliotherapy*



***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

Gifted young women and men have different reading preferences. Hébert (2009) reported that young women typically enjoy reading to address affective concerns and

literature related to relationships. Hébert et al. (2001) concluded that women need to vicariously experience the feeling of others by engaging with biographies filled with the portrayal of inspiring achievements, challenges, and disappointments. Young women might need exposure to biographies to inspire women in high-level careers (Halstead, 2009). Halstead (2009) confirmed that girls prefer fiction and boys prefer nonfiction, though boys try fiction more frequently than girls try nonfiction.

The reading preferences of young men, however, change as they mature. Young men typically choose more nonfiction over fiction as they enter middle and high school (Langerman, 1990). Young men need opportunities for introspection and to express their emotions; reading biographies can present that opportunity (Hébert, 2009). Allowing boys to read biographies and then examine their problems through a third-person approach can be a beneficial way for them to express and understand emotions (Hébert, 2009). Halsted (2009) corroborated that it is a powerful tool when boys read biographies of men who overcome difficulties to be successful and achieve a deeper self-understanding of themselves through success.

Literature selection is pivotal for a gifted reader. Halstead (2009) strongly emphasized that if a book is given to a child, the adult must read the book and discuss with the child if it is around a problem they are facing. Siegle (2013) discussed guidelines for selecting bibliotherapy books that the recommender read thoroughly, be current, credible, and relevant to the issue, embrace cultural respect and inclusiveness, facilitated, and followed up upon to determine effectiveness.

Halstead (2009) discussed how frequently gifted adults read literature to address multipotentiality. She relates an example of a medical school student hoping to seek a balance between daily life and engaging in music-related books. Halstead (2009) also shared the story of a man who gave up his academic career to be a fly fisherman but still engaged in compelling and complex novels. Eventually, he, his wife, and his friends discussed these novels at length. This exploration of novels outside of one's chosen career path provides an opportunity to continue it through reading. Halstead (2009) called this *mature reading*, which she discusses as reading to reflect personal needs or interests about various subjects but with depth in areas of interest. This relates to the many ways that bibliotherapy could be performed by a gifted individual—that through addressing their multipotentiality through literature, they are, in effect, reading for a bibliotherapeutic purpose in reaching catharsis. Halstead (2009) confirmed that reading serves as a tool for individual growth and is generally purposeful. The reading can be for aesthetic pleasure, and Halstead (2009) asserted:

Mature readers may read slowly, savoring sentence structure and descriptive passages, or they may devour several books simultaneously. While not everything they read is written on a high level, much of it is, and their competence in the skill of reading is superior at all levels. (pp. 99-100)

Halstead (2009) encouraged high school students to be introduced to mature reading to continue it through adulthood as an acceptable and enjoyable experience, especially if few of their peers still enjoy leisure reading. Mature reading is a concept that directly connects with the exploration of this study.

The most common theme in gifted literature is the biographies as a bibliotherapeutic practice (Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Cross, 2011; Galbraith &

Delisle, 2015; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009). Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller (1989) first made the connection of using biographies and autobiographies with gifted students as an opportunity to study the lives of other gifted and creative individuals. Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller (1989) asserted that the use of famous individuals were easier to emulate when they are portrayed with flaws instead of being mythical heroes. Hébert (2009) expressed that gifted teenagers reading biographies allowed for exposure to different “philosophical views of life; various liberal and conservative world views; and a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds, cultures, and religions” (p. 266). This exposure may be the first time a gifted reader has experienced any given concept, especially depending on where they grew up. Gifted readers resonate with realistic portrayals and experiences concluded with sensible strategies for overcoming adversity and developing resilience, which is why autobiographies and biographies work well (Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009). Hébert (2009, 2011) discussed the importance of follow-up activities to reinforce learning and allow for introspection, insight, and application from their learning through biographies. The ability to use literature as a driving force for understanding occurs throughout a gifted reader’s lifetime. Pfeiffer (2012) also discussed biographies of famous people, and films can serve as a way to convey personal lessons which are impactful for gifted students. These books can be inspirational and show the difficulties gifted individuals face. The role of genre in bibliotherapy is important to note. Most of the literature for gifted bibliotherapy relates only to biographies or autobiographies. However, there is an argument that all forms of fiction and nonfiction allow for opportunities to progress through the bibliotherapeutic process.

Cross (2011) discussed the efficacy of using bibliotherapy in conjunction with biographies to help gifted students. Cross (2011) asserted that children's understanding would be raised when reading about the experiences of the eminent person. Additionally, students may find a connection to the biographies to realize that these people faced the same issues as students. According to Cross (2011), "This realization tends to reduce feelings of isolation while at the same time providing ideas for dealing with the difficulties gifted people encounter" (pp. 84-85). Parents can use this practice in conjunction with conversations with their gifted children regarding diversity issues. Galbraith and Delisle (2015) echoed this assertion that bibliotherapy allows an opportunity for what is often a first-time exposure to people like gifted students like the reader, whose "lives, struggles, and decisions are revealing and affirming" (p. 107). Providing books that meet the themes of the gifted learners' needs can be beneficial. The subjects can be any person, but it is important to note that most famous persons who have biographies and autobiographies would most likely be identified as gifted according to gifted definitions and parameters.

### ***Challenges***

There are several challenges in the field of bibliotherapy. First, there is no common definition, which can weaken the impact of findings (Halstead, 2009). As aforementioned, bibliotherapy has several definitions, and the philosophies guiding it vary by author and audience. Additionally, some studies have checklists, and others have pre- and post-tests following reading (Halstead, 2009). Some research does not include discussion elements following reading, and others do (Halstead, 2009). Many of the

studies are in relation to therapy, so clinical bibliotherapy is being used, which can be the use of self-help books and not fiction, so fiction remains unvalidated (Halstead, 2009).

There is limited research on bibliotherapy with gifted children (Halstead, 2009). There is very little research done on gifted adults. Another challenge is the impact of literature varies by the reader, and “Attempts to measure and quantify the effect of art on personality will always be thwarted to some degree by the elusiveness of the concepts involved” (Halstead, 2009, p. 109).

Bibliotherapy is meant to prevent problems, not cure them, and there can be underlying problems. Anyone who discusses issues with children should know when to refer to a mental health professional (Halstead, 2009). Halstead (2009) warned that responses that reveal “excessive anger, aggression, anxiety, depression, fear, preoccupation with sexuality, inability to have empathy for others, little or no social life, or inordinately high or perfectionistic standards for themselves” can be cause for concern (p. 116). In addition, the socioemotional needs of gifted students can create maladaptive needs, which must be addressed if revealed. Lastly, Halsted (2009) forewarned that there could be possibilities for depression and potential suicide in children and to be aware of any indications and connect with the right people. The depth of a conversation should be considered so that topics that may be sensitive do not become more hurtful than helpful.

Another challenge is didactic fiction (viz., stories designed to teach a lesson). According to Halstead (2009), “fiction written for bibliotherapeutic purposes usually fails as literature---it is too earnest, and since discerning readers see through it quickly, it cannot bear the weight of serious discussion” (p. 120). As gifted readers are discerning,

this form of literature could present potential problems for a true bibliotherapeutic process. Halstead (2009) shared the power of literature: “To speak authentically to the emotions and to reflect truly the human condition, fiction chosen for bibliotherapy must exemplify literature as the art form it was meant to be” (p. 120). Thus, the power of literature is the human condition, something that is not easily replicated.

### **Why Literature Resonates**

Literature is a powerful tool for human emotions and experiences; a good piece of literature will stay with you, encouraging you to think about it frequently, evoke an emotional response, return to the themes, and examine the choices made by characters long after you are done. Literature invites the bibliotherapeutic process and allows gifted individuals to engage beyond what is written on the page. Bibliotherapy is successful when a gifted reader sees something of themselves in the novel, identifies with characters, reflects on that identification, and experiences emotional growth because of reading (Hébert, 1995, 2009; Hébert et al., 2001). Halstead (2009) confirmed that a skillful author could make us care about characters with the same problems. These authors can create an emotional release, or *catharsis*, and allow for *insight* into their own experiences (Halstead, 2009). Discussion of characters or plot of books can lead to a new understanding of a person’s experiences (Halstead, 2009). Halstead (2009) contended,

Many of us can relate to having identified so strongly with a character that we made him or her a part of ourselves or adopted his or her attitude toward a situation, and we have all been confronted by knowing that an author has perfectly described our inmost feelings. (p. 108).

This is the power of literature. It can span across demographics and decades. It can emotionally impact and develop values and goals (Halstead, 2009). It is also a part of the



bibliotherapeutic process, as one would not engage with literature that does not readily invite engagement in the process.

Literature asks us to ask ourselves interpretive questions (viz., those whose answers are open to interpretation). These are honest questions to which there is no clear answer. Literature opens us up to times and places we will never experience and can expand awareness of human emotions, lifestyles, concerns, and ways of relating to each other (Halstead, 2009). Change comes from confrontation with candid feelings and the “cognitive process of first recognizing feelings and then sorting out and *evaluating* the feeling responses (McCarty Hynes & Hynes Berry, 2012). McCarty Hynes and Hynes Berry (2012) shared that through reading, there can be a stimulation by a new topic or idea that is completely unrelated to mundane matters of life or “fresh input of the literature give a new perspective to an issue that dominates one’s thoughts” (p. 17). Literature can work as a catalyst for unacknowledged feelings, catharsis, and exposure to juxtaposed ideas and allows for integrating new ideas (McCarty Hynes & Hynes Berry, 2012). Ann Camacho shared, “In the process of reflection on what we have read, and then committing our own thoughts to the written word, we connect with the greater world around us” (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015, p. 107). To echo this idea, Ingram (2003) asserted, “gifted students who read and share sociocultural poetry by published others, or who write and recite their own, are empowered by the opportunity to release pent-up emotions that can emanate from personal, societal, and cultural concerns” (p. 85). Accordingly, the power of literature goes beyond the self.

Mofield and Parker Peters (2018) shared that bibliotherapy teaches interpersonal understanding. This relates to catharsis and universalization within the bibliotherapeutic process. Providing students with a passage and taking the time to consider perspectives can allow skills to be generalized deliberately. VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) argued that the arts and bibliotherapy allow for self-expression and a “vent for the emotional sensibilities, effectively serving as another kind of therapy” (p. 230). VanTassel-Baska et al. (2009) connected the idea that reading novels can change the understanding of the meaning of life; reading can have an emotional conflict, which can help with development, and involves a personal searching of students by asking for responses to stories.

### ***Purpose of Reading***

There are fundamental distinctions in how readers and writers orient themselves when engaging in literary understanding. Langer (1994) asserted that readers read for literary or discursive purposes. Literary purpose allows for exploring emotions, relationships, motives, and reactions—all elements of being a human—and this process is cyclical. After reading, the reader rethinks their interpretations and reconsiders themselves, the world, and society. They are attempting to go beyond the information and explore new possibilities and actions by using their reading to reflect on their own lives, the lives of others, and the human condition. Whereas reading for discursive purposes—to share or gain information—garners a focus on the sense or point of a topic being made. Readers may build upon, clarify, or modify their understandings, but overall opinions remain unchanging. It is only through a substantial amount of countervailing evidence

that a reader is forced to rethink a topic. These two purposes often work together, with one taking the lead, but the interplay adds richness to the understanding.

### **Socioemotional Categories**

Halstead (2009) formulated book categories based on characteristics and issues tackled within them. These categories are in direct conjunction with gifted and high intellectual ability, the characteristics, and the issues those persons face. These socioemotional categories inherently occur within literature and provide the reader opportunities to connect and develop identity.

**Table 2**

*Judith Halstead Categories of Content in Novels*

Category	Explanation
<i>Achievement</i>	plots that question whether or not a bright child or young adult will achieve
<i>Aloneness</i>	books that can help youngsters explore feelings of isolation, recognize that they may be good reasons for experiencing aloneness, and understand that alone time is necessary and can be productive
<i>Arrogance</i>	characters who display arrogance because they do not fit in or because they do not fully understand a situation
<i>Creativity</i>	characters whose creative impulses set them apart
<i>Developing imagination</i>	books that stimulate thinking, observing, and question, keeping children in touch with the joy and power of using their imagination
<i>Differences</i>	stories dealing with people who are different because of traits such as ability, insight, sensitivity, because of a life experience, or because of a physical or psychological characteristic that sets them apart
<i>Drive to understand</i>	the most wide-ranging category, listing books that will challenge children intellectually and present them with new ideas
<i>Identity</i>	characters who learn to accept talent as positive attribute and work toward a strong self-concept. Gifted children often feel different and “wrong;” these books can help them become comfortable with and even celebrate their abilities
<i>Intensity</i>	characters who are unusually focused on an interest, ability, or cause with a single-mindedness not shared by most children their age

<i>Introversion</i>	people who prefer to spend much of their time alone and who use that time creatively
<i>Moral concerns</i>	personal or community issues that require difficult decision
<i>Perfectionism</i>	examples of what happens when a character puts too much emphasis on a perfect product
<i>Relationships with others</i>	books that facilitate discussion of interdependence, empathy, and respect for others, or that promote an understanding of friendships and how they are formed
<i>Resilience</i>	stories in which characters learn to tolerate frustration, adapt to situations that require them to change, overcome maladaptive patterns, and/or set goals—in short, stories that show characters recovering from setbacks
<i>Sensitivity</i>	characters who are intensely aware, introspective, unusually alert to the hurts of others, and/or particularly sensitive to being hurt themselves
<i>Using ability</i>	books that raise questions about the responsibilities that gifted people have for their own talents, about decision making, and about the rewards that can follow the best use of those talents

From: Halsted, J. W. (2009). *Some of my best friends are books* (3rd ed.), pp. 238-240. Great Potential Press.

## **Summary**

The history and evolution of bibliotherapy have made the theory and practice challenging to determine, especially with no discernable definition. The literature of gifted bibliotherapy beyond the seminal works (Adderholdt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Halsted, 1988, 2009; Shrodes, 1949) is primarily anecdotal and interpretive. The power of literature is that it can catalyze change and catharsis. There is an innate collaboration between literature and an individual, and the bibliotherapeutic process allows readers to change their understanding of themselves and the world around them. Gifted readers routinely use metacognition, and the study hopes to explore if they use it when reading and engaging in literature.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy were examined in this study. This was completed through the lens of the bibliotherapeutic process and with the method of portraiture. Portraiture allowed me to engage with participants and retain my voice in the research. As a gifted reader, I have experienced many of the elements firsthand, which are engrained in my person. It would be impossible to remove them. Portraiture appreciates personal context and embraces the inclusion of my voice as long as the portraits of the participants remain at the forefront.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to examine gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy. This was accomplished through qualitative research, wherein participants were interviewed about their use of bibliotherapy from youth to adulthood. The research examined through three interviews of gifted adults and their use of the bibliotherapeutic process to address their affective needs. The research also investigated how the participants worked through the process, if they required outside discussion to progress through the bibliotherapeutic process, or if they used metacognition. After assessing the literature, an element of discussion is necessary for the completion of the bibliotherapeutic process (Adderholt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992), so the findings illustrate that bibliotherapy wherein there is no discussion can be developed.

## **Research Questions**

The primary question was: How do gifted adults use bibliotherapy? The sub questions included:

1. How do gifted adults perceive bibliotherapy as a mechanism to address affective needs?
2. How do gifted adults perceive their use of bibliotherapy as children and/or adolescents?
3. How does the use of bibliotherapy change from youth to adulthood?
4. How do gifted adults utilize metacognition in the bibliotherapeutic process?

## **Rationale for Portraiture**

The research selected for this study was qualitative methods using Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis' (1997) portraiture. This methodology was chosen for several reasons, the most prominent being that I have a connection to this topic as a researcher. Portraiture allowed the work to be a *duet* between the research and the researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). As a gifted adult reader with a bachelor's degree in English, I am well-read. I spoke with participants about their engagement with novels to address potential affective needs. Finally, portraiture allowed for personal context, or the individual characteristics and experiences, which enriched the overall process, as it is not something I can remove from myself (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) shared an in-depth look at portraiture, which Lawrence-Lightfoot created and Hoffmann Davis used. Lawrence-

Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) discussed in depth how the researcher's voice is present throughout the process, all while using female pronouns. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) shared that the researcher is no longer a disembodied human, but a living, breathing person who will bring her knowledge and insight to make the perspective accurate. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) asserted that portraiture is complex and subtle but requires careful, systematic, and detailed description developed through watching, listening, and interacting with actors over a sustained period of time. Taking those elements and piecing them into the themes with "aesthetic principles of composition and form, rhythm, sequence, and metaphor" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 12) were used to create the portraits. The essence and resonance of the experiences and perspectives revealed through action and thought must be captured authentically. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) stated there is diligence to both empirical description and aesthetic expression, and that which is not shared is as equally important as what is shared.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) discussed how the self is a part of the researcher; the decision to study, the study's definition, the sample, the methodology, the predisposition, and the perspectives are all crucial interdependent elements. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) shared, "the voice of the portraitist often helps us identify her place in the inquiry" (p. 13). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) asserted the portraitist goal is to "document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflect in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified" (p. 14).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) pronounced, “the voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and frameworks she brings to the inquiry; in the question she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of story she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative” (p. 85). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) went on to iterate, “the portraitist’s work is deeply empirical, grounded in systematically collected data, skeptical questioning (of self and actors), and rigorous examination of biases—always open to disconfirming evidence” (p. 85). The portraitist’s voice must be premediated, restrained, disciplined, and controlled, so as a researcher, I was cognizant of what was included and not included.

### **Recruitment Partner**

The Pikes Peak Association of Gifted Students (PPAGS) was my recruitment partner. PPAGS is a local, regional affiliate of the Colorado Association of Gifted and Talented (CAGT), an affiliate of the National Association of the Gifted Children (NAGC). PPAGS serves approximately one million people in the Pikes Peak region and provides opportunities for families. PPAGS (n.d.) provides “partnerships and connections, education, support, and advocacy for gifted and talented individuals” (para. 1). PPAGS provides parental mini-conferences and roundtable discussions. See Appendix A for the recruitment partner agreement and their roles.

### **Data Collection**

#### ***Recruitment***

Participants were recruited from the recruitment partner after collecting IRB Exempt Determination (Appendix B). My recruitment plan allowed my recruitment



partner to disseminate the introduction to the study letter (Appendix C). Next, participants self-selected for the study; there was initial canned communication with participants (Appendix D). Participants also recommended other participants for the study, allowing for snowball sampling to achieve an ideal number of participants (Best & Kahn, 2006). Finally, the participants emailed me directly if they were interested in participating in the study. From there, informed consent (Appendix E) was emailed and the potential participant was informed that if they wanted to continue the study they could opt-in by sharing their demographic data (Appendix D).

Participant selection was finalized through direct email contact by those who were interested in the study. Two initial potential participants never responded after informed consent was shared. Participants completed the first two interviews between December 2021 – March 2022. Participants completed two sixty-minute to two-hour interviews, which were concluded by February 2022. In the fall of 2022, it was determined to add a seventh participant. Recruitment through snowball sampling occurred, and the initial interview of the final participant was conducted in February 2023, and the second interview in March 2023. Before the final interview, participants were sent their portraits for review and member-checking (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final thirty-minute to ninety-minute interview was spent reviewing each participant’s portrait and allowing for one more opportunity to probe the research with an opportunity for additions by both the researcher and the participant. These were completed in March – April 2023.

Overwhelmingly, participants’ responses to their portraits varied, but they were all positive. One participant shared reading her portrait felt like she was “looking in a

mirror.” Another participant shared, “I can’t deny that is me, but it’s not how I see myself, internally...but it is me... it’s weird.” A final participant added, “I’m so grateful for the experience. I got more out of it than I thought. It felt like free therapy.” All participants were given a \$50.00 gift card to either Amazon or Tattered Cover, depending upon personal preference. All IRB protocols and procedures were followed.

***Participants***

Participants were a mixture of gifted educators, parents, and community members. Participants were diverse persons and backgrounds, including gender, the highest level of education, age, race/ethnicity, and gifted identification, as they could be officially identified or self-identified. Participant data mostly mirrored the local demographic data (see Table 3), including the most recent American Community Survey report (World Population Review, 2022).

**Table 3**

*Colorado Springs Demographics*

<i>Racial Composition</i>		<i>Gender</i>	<i>Median Age</i>	<i>Highest Level of Education</i>
White	78.47%	Female	Female	Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Black or African American		232,431 persons	36.4 years	2.15%
	6.51%	50.00%	Male	9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade
Two or more races	5.93%	Male	33.2 years	3.92%
Other races	5.08%	232,440 persons	Average	High School Graduate
Asian	2.90%	50.00%	34.7 years	19.97%
Native American	0.83%			Some College
Native Hawaiian or				23.44%
Pacific Islander	0.28%			Associates Degree
				10.63%

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Bachelor's Degree
24.34%
Graduate Degree
15.55%

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Participant data is not as diverse as I hoped it would be. Five participants are female. All participants earned a Bachelor's degree, with almost all completing a Master's degree. Participants were split between being formally identified as gifted and informally identifying themselves in their adulthood. Participant demographic data is detailed below in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Participant Demographics*

<i>Participant Pseudonym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>	<i>Gifted Identification</i>	<i>Grew Up</i>	<i>Highest Level of Education</i>
Damia	Female	30s	African American	Informally identified	Georgia/ Japan	Master's Degree
Ariel	Female	40s	Caucasian	Formally Identified	Colorado	Master's Degree
Rachel	Female	40s	Caucasian	Informally identified	Colorado	Master's Degree
Pikel	Male	40s	European American	Formally Identified	California/ Germany	Master's Degree
Marie	Female	50s	Mestiza/Latinx	Informally identified	Colorado/ New Mexico	Some graduate school
James	Male	50s	Caucasian	Formally identified	Chicago	Master's Degree
Reyna	Female	50s	Caucasian	Formally Identified	Colorado	Master's Degree

***Informed Consent and Participant Protection***

Participants completed three interviews. Participants received informed consent prior to our first interview (Appendix E), and by proceeding in the process, there was a

verbal agreement to informed consent. All interviews were conducted using Zoom meeting software and were recorded and transcribed. Participants were reminded that participation is voluntary and confidential.

Participant data and interview transcription were de-identified using a pseudonym for each participant. The recorded videos were deleted following the successful defense of the dissertation. The transcripts were kept indefinitely, but only with pseudonyms. The participants' names and pseudonyms were kept confidential. Special care was taken to ensure no data shared harmed the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All digital information was stored securely. No information was falsified (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Since portraiture aims to present the findings aesthetically and accurately, I asked participants to review their portraits (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Participants looked for factual errors in the text and opportunities for additions or more details. They were reminded that the hope was for the portrait to be *authentic*, even though it would not appear like they had written it (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) share their own experience with this process and the lessons learned:

constituents pointed out particular parts of direct quotes that they feared would be hurtful to constituents in ways we hadn't anticipated. While we did not change the wording of direct quotations (which had been scrupulously recorded) we were most often able to respond to these comments by omitting portions of a quotation and incorporating less charged but relevant comments within the sentence that introduced the quote. (p. 173)

I adopted a similar perspective, asking for participant feedback about their portrait. I had made it clear I would not change the work's overall theme unless it would harm the participant. However, in this research study, no sections were removed after allowing

participants the option. One participant explored a topic in their interview that they did not want to be included in their portrait. This topic was added as an area of future research.

***Interview Protocols***

Interview protocols were used to improve reliability and validity (Best & Kahn, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Each interview was conducted using Zoom; it was recorded and transcribed. At the beginning of each interview, the protocols were in place. Interview Protocols were adapted from Creswell and Creswell (2018).

**Table 5**

*Interview Protocol Outline*

<i>Interview Protocol</i>	
⊖	<i>Basic Information</i> Date and time of interview and names of interviewer and interviewee.
	<i>Introduction</i>
⊖	Introduction of interviewer and purpose of the study. Reminder of previously acknowledged informed consent. Structure of the interview (more discussion than interview), definition of terms, allow for questions, and reminder of voluntary nature of participation.
	<i>Opening Question</i>
⊖	General question to open dialogue and make interviewee feel more comfortable.
	<i>Content Questions</i>
⊖	Questions that relate to the central research question and sub questions of the study.
	<i>Follow-Up with Probing Questions</i>
⊖	Content questions will allow for use of probing questions to receive more information or elaborate.
	<i>Closing Instructions</i>
⊖	Thank the interviewee, remind them of confidentiality, offer when their portrait will be available for review, discuss follow-up interview if needed.

### *Interview Questions and Process*

For interviews, the merits between open conversations and semi-structured interviews were considered. Structured interviews would be too rigid for the research and the methodology. However, there needed to be combination of flexibility and consistent questions to determine similarities and differences among participants. Therefore, the interview questions were conducted using semi-structured interview protocols with open-ended questions (Billups, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interview protocol went through an expert review conducted by Dr. Jim Delisle. Delisle has been a teacher of educators of gifted children and gifted children for over 30 years; he has recently retired from Kent State University. Delisle has written more than 15 books and 250 articles. Delisle provided critical judgment and feedback to solicit essential questions and ensured the questions presented to participants were not repetitive and addressed the research questions accurately (Best & Kahn, 2006). This use of expert review improved the study's validity, as it was carefully designed to ensure important information was elicited from the participants (Best & Kahn, 2006). In addition, the interview was devised so that I could deviate in questions in order to develop a storyline, which was adapted into a portrait for the participant (Billups, 2021; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The rationale for semi-structured interviews allowed the conversation to remain flexible, to modify the order of details of topics, and to remain "free to follow new leads as they arise" (Billups, 2021, p. 43). As the researcher, I could adapt the interview as the

conversation unfolded by determining what question should ensue following a response (Billups, 2021).

The purpose of the opening question was to encourage the interviewee to open up to the research (Billups, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questions were open-ended and focused on the themes of the study (Best & Kahn, 2006; Billups, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Most questions were followed with probing questions allowing for further reiteration and follow-up as necessary (Billups, 2021). Additionally, to improve the reliability of the response, questions could have been asked in different ways at different times (Best & Kahn, 2006). Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and protocols were used for all interview engagements with participants (Billups, 2021). During the first interview, it became clear that participants had books that were meaningful to them and that four of the seven participants had been reading that book since childhood. I read the most meaningful book of each participant before the second interview. In the second interview, the participants and I were able to go more in-depth about that novel and its long-lasting implications for their life. Their most meaningful novel was used to frame questions surrounding the bibliotherapeutic process for participants. This also created an additional rapport between me and the participant. It seemed to create a shared experience for them and allowed me to ask pointed and poignant questions to the participant. It also provided for an additional measure for analysis of the participants. Finally, participants continued to reflect on the process and their responses through emails with during the portrait writing phase. For Interview One Protocol, see Appendix F; for Interview Two Protocols, see Appendix G; for Follow-Up

and Portrait Review Protocols, see Appendix H. During the interview, I noted nonverbal behaviors and utilized the Interview Note-taking Sheet, see Appendix I.

Interviews were conducted online using Zoom, as the research started during the COVID-19 pandemic. I continued this practice throughout for consistency. It allowed for us to meet at times and for durations that may have been otherwise infeasible. Zoom permitted an intimacy between participants and myself that might not have been present in our initial interviews otherwise, since they took place in spaces where participants were comfortable. My interviews were completed without a filter or background, so the backdrop was my shared office with my husband, allowing participants a glimpse into my personal life and domain. Participants were equally transparent, sharing their living spaces with me in the background of their cameras. One participant used a background image for ten minutes, but then felt comfortable enough to show her own space; another participant started interview with “nerdy” backgrounds but dropped them partially through the interview. Two different participant’s offices changed in the year that elapsed between our second and third interviews, and we were able to discuss that. In my circumstance, participants were forthright and honest about their experiences and being in a familiar location may have aided in that transparency.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The portraiture *duet* allowed the research and the researcher to examine the answers surrounding the role of literature in the participant’s life. As the researcher, it is my duty to find the story in the research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) believed that the researcher must share



the disposition of voice (the story) and the articulation of voice (the telling of the story). In portraiture, there is a close relationship between the research and the researcher (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997), which I found to be the case. The importance of the phenomena needed to be illuminated; this may have included things that the participants were unaware of themselves (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The context (human experience) is of value in portraiture that will be identified through my interaction with participants and their responses—the reader should feel that they are there engaging with the participant (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) shared the importance of context to research in the portraiture model. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) devised three forces that frame, reveal, and enliven the portrait:

*Personal context* is evident as the experiential repertoire of the artists or researcher, *historical context* places the portrayal in a setting that transcends the limits of the aesthetic space, and *internal context* comprises the contextual details included within the aesthetic space. (p. 74)

By addressing these three areas, I produced a complete portrait. The *personal context* was that of the participant and their engagement with bibliotherapy. The *historical context* was their meaningful novel, which will endure as a form of literature well beyond their life. Finally, the *internal context* was their reading preferences and locations since all interviews were conducted through Zoom. The internal context was also their use of metacognition as they engaged deeply with the novels they read.

In portraiture, there is a heavy focus on the inclusion of voice, and two areas will be most strongly represented in this study: preoccupation and autobiography (Lawrence-

Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Preoccupation, according to Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997), “refers to the ways in which her observations and her text are shaped by the assumptions she brings to the inquiry, reflecting her disciplinary background, her theoretical perspectives, her intellectual interests, and her understanding of the relevant literature” (p. 93). My intersectionality as a gifted reader meant all these elements are present in the research. Voice as autobiography is defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) as “The researcher brings her own history—familial, cultural, ideological, and educational—to the inquiry. Her perspective, her questions, and her insights are inevitably shaped by these profound developmental and autobiographical experiences” (p. 95). These life experiences must be used to understand and connect, but it must be done with restraint (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) reminded researchers to ask themselves:

How (to what extent) does the disposition of my voice inform (give shape to but not distort) the product (the developing portrait)? And the question that portraitists must repeatedly ask of product is How (to what extent) does the articulation of my voice inform (clarify but not mislead) the process (the developing understanding)? (p. 106).

## **Data Analysis**

### ***Portrait Coding and Themes***

This research analysis was conducted in four phases: Phase 1: working with raw interview data, words, and notes; Phase 2: data reduction into categories; Phase 3: data analysis and interpretation to represent the experience; Phase 4: data representation into organized patterns for conclusions and recommendations (Billups, 2021). Following

Zoom interviews, the data was transcribed. I kept notes during interviews and started recognizing commonalities among participants' engagement with bibliotherapy.

Following the completion of the second interview, I examined each participant, one at a time, coding their interviews and completing their portrait. When necessary, I returned to previous portraits to add details or make additional connections.

Data was coded into the following categories: reading, metacognition and discussion, affective, and bibliotherapeutic process. The bibliotherapeutic process served as the conceptual framework for the study: identification (recognizing), catharsis (feeling), insight (thinking), and universalization (applying) (Halstead, 2009). The codes became the emergent themes and experiences of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). These emergent themes became the portraits of individuals. The analysis was a combination of experiences for the gifted reader participants, their meaningful books, and realizations I drew, which the participants might not have made connections to themselves. From the portraits, I determined conclusions and recommendations regarding gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy.

As the researcher, I checked for qualitative validity, wherein the research was accurate from the researcher's standing (Best & Kahn, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Attempts were made to triangulate the data by examining the sources to determine themes and then use themes to claim the study's validity (Best & Kahn, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research also has a rich, thick description to communicate findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With portraiture, the reader should be transported to a

shared experience through the discussion of bibliotherapy, which adds validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). I clarified bias concerning my comments on interpreting the findings and my background and history as a gifted reader (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I presented discrepant information or any information contradictory to emergent themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Finally, member checking through requiring participants to review their portraits ensured accuracy, safeguarded against potential for harm, and offered an opportunity to adapt and enrich the portraiture where necessary (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

### ***Important Considerations and Difficult Considerations***

Interviews with participants were detailed, fascinating, and nuanced. Each participant was vulnerable and appeared honest, even in the first interview. It was challenging to determine what to include and exclude from portraits. I wanted the portraits to be a combination of my words and those of the participants. I wanted the portraits to be indicative of their experiences with literature at all ages. The decision to read the meaningful book for the participant led to overall more engaging and in-depth second interviews, all lasting between one and two hours. This also provided an opportunity to make connections the participant had not seen, as I was an outsider looking in on their reflection of the novel and their own life. Specific quotations were chosen to illustrate examples of the participants' encounters with the themes of the study. In portraiture, the themes are not explicit, but rather the reader should come to their

understanding of the topic, and I endeavored to embody that experience for her readers (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

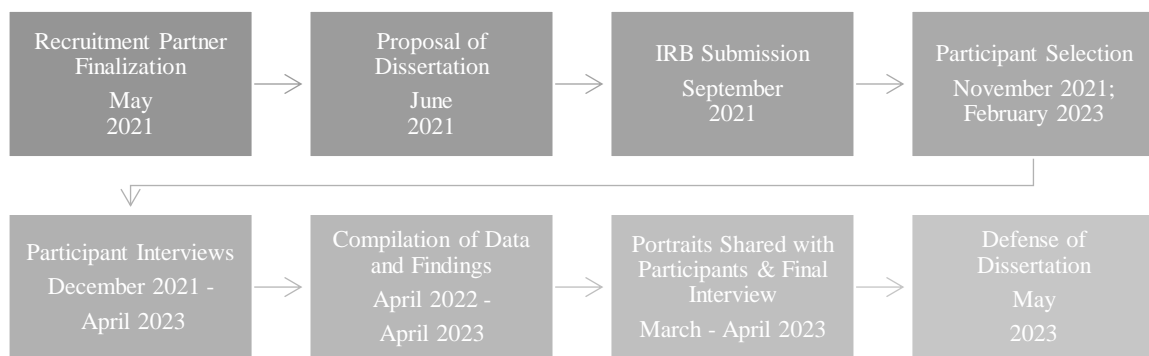
### *Notes on Composition*

All portraits follow the same organizational pattern based on the themes that emerged. The organization of each portrait is as follows: the participant's engagement as a gifted reader, their most meaningful (or their most meaningful repeatedly read) book, their examples of the bibliotherapeutic process, their examples of reading to address affective needs, and their use of discussion, metacognition, and annotation. There was intersectionality within multiple themes, but direct quotations and summaries were added where I felt they were a more profound example of a particular theme. The most crucial intersectionality to highlight is the interconnectedness of reading and bibliotherapy. Without a standard definition, the research has erred on the side of caution in incorporating all elements of reading as bibliotherapy, in line with Lenkowsky's (1987) definition of using reading to induce affective change, personal growth, and development. So, each portrait is divided into component sections illustrating how the participant engages in bibliotherapy, although that terminology is not used. Details of the plot of novels were embedded into the portraits, where it seemed vital for clarity and context. Finally, direct quotations from the participant were embedded into the narrative to help illustrate the participant's experiences. These quotations did not include fillers (e.g., um, like, sort of, kind of, etc.) but did include long pauses (e.g., ellipsis) as they helped shape the narrative (Billups, 2021; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997).

In lieu of quotation marks, and for ease of readability and the aesthetic whole, I removed quotation marks when directly quoting from the participant in each portrait; instead, this text appears in *italics* (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). If the participant is discussing their thoughts or what a person has said to them as a quotation, then a single quotation mark is used, as in line with a quotation within a quotation. Additionally, the explicit decision not to block indent longer quotations was made, as that hindered the readability of the portrait and removed the reader from the experience. I hope that the reader was able to devise the *resonant refrain* and metaphor of participants based on their meaningful books (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). This resonant refrain is addressed in the final section of each portrait, in the interpretation that I have made as a member of the *duet* for the participant's primary form of reading in relation to our interviews. It is my hope that I have weaved a tapestry of each of their unique stories and interactions with bibliotherapy (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). In addition, the participant's voice needed to be ever-present in each portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Finally, because of the use of *italics* in the portraits, book or movie titles referenced by participants in portrait chapters are underlined.

### **Timeline**

The timeline for this research project spanned two years. Participants were given time with their portraits before our final interview.



## Summary

The portraiture lens allowed my intersectionality as a gifted reader to work as part of a *duet* with the lived experiences of participants. Findings presented in the form of individual portraits made the research more personable and readily accessible for the reader (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Semi-structured interview protocols helped make the research more valid and reliable while allowing me to adapt the interview and develop a storyline. Reading the most meaningful book for each participant allowed for more engagement with the participant and provided an opportunity for a more detailed and nuanced perspective, providing an opportunity to better understand the gifted reader. It also created an extra layer of interpretation for data analysis. Portrait data analysis using the emergent themes of reading, meaningful book, the bibliotherapeutic process, addressing affective needs, and discussion and metacognition lent itself to illuminating how gifted adults use bibliotherapy.

## Chapter Four: Portrait of a Gifted Reader in Her 30s

The following three chapters are the individual portraits of gifted adult readers grouped by age. Each portrait follows the same organizational pattern of engagement with bibliotherapy (i.e., reading to induce affective change and personal growth). There is an interconnectedness between bibliotherapy and the bibliotherapeutic process, both of which are components of each section of the portrait. Themes drawn from participants could have been placed in multiple areas of their portrait; however, I attempted organized placement depending on the most prominent context. As a reminder, direct quotations from the participant were embedded into the narrative to help illustrate the participant's experiences and are in *italics*, so book titles are underlined. Additionally, for reference to the novels presented in each portrait, refer to Appendix J; Appendix K references all films referenced in portraits.

### Damia

*As an adult, I need to learn what other people want to say. Recently in the United States, there's been a whole era of misinformation. And how dare you trust that source? And I get that we need to have information literacy. But almost everything I've learned almost has been someone else's story to me. That is how I engage with and how I know the world. I didn't live before I was born. I haven't lived in many other countries. I'm not living in California or where there's the blizzard or the snow or, you know, Ukraine where there's war. Are these things even happening? How would I know? Other than the*



*level of trust? And I think about how ancient times, before the printing press, it was story. We communicated knowledge through story. We communicated through themes. Through parables, but also those little stories like the boy who cried wolf. That has a feeling in it. The student or children, how to behave or how to be careful when you bring up alarm so that you're believed. So, I guess all of these stories, that's why I'm reading. I'm reading to learn what other people want to say. And even if I know it's fiction, you can still learn so much. And when someone is lying. Why? There're so many other questions [to] that. What do they think they need to say? What pressures are they under that they have to produce content that I don't think is true? So, I guess I like the curiosity part, as well; figuring out what I value and what I want to let in.*

### **An Introduction to Damia**

Damia sat in her house, speaking to me during the day. Her dark hair is a tangle of curls, and she tells me about the fictional book she just finished, Mexican Gothic. She said she could relate to the theme of wanting to get out when things are bad. Damia grew up in Georgia in a devoutly religious home and spent time in Japan as an only child—her dad was in the military, and her mother was an educator. Damia's metacognition is on display as she questions every thought she has. She is purposeful in her word choice, pausing to figure out the correct orientation of her sentences as she relates her life as a reader. Damia started reading at four, but immediately clarified, *What's reading at that age? What's remembering and storytelling? Unclear*. This habit of questioning her thoughts was evident throughout our conversations. At six years old, Damia remembered getting positive attention for her reading skills from librarians and teachers. She vividly

recalled in the first week of first grade when it was suggested she move to third grade for the remainder of the year for English and math instruction. She remembered her hesitancy to skip an entire grade level, and as an adult, she reflected on why it was decided she should stay in first grade for science and social studies coursework. However, she was accelerated, and it began her dichotomous relationship with math and reading—one wherein she was compelled as an advanced math student, and though *relatively better than my peers*, she felt like her English skills were where she was meant to excel—but that was not the focus of her education. However, despite the content level acceleration, Damia was never officially identified as gifted. Damia reflected teachers recognized that she was different than other students and would give her various opportunities. She wondered if she had *light-skinned privilege*. As an adult, she took the MENSA test and scored at the 99.9 percentile. Then, she started to explore what it meant to be gifted, and as she read articles about it, she finally identified herself as gifted.

Damia, who is in her 30s and identifies herself as a biracial African American, is an avid collector of books. She described a Japanese term, *tsundoku*—the phenomenon of acquiring books but not reading them—as a term describing her. She is a diligent purchaser of digital copies of books and audiobooks to reference them when needed. Damia prefers modern conveniences, but she is a pragmatist. She divulged, *I am a big fan of digital devices as much as possible, with keeping in mind the fear of the singularity. The fear of tech dying and not having access*. She also discussed her growing collection of physical books, ranging from childhood favorites to gardening and cookbooks. Finally,

she adds, tongue-in-cheek, with a chuckle, that she likes books that could help us rebuild civilization after a zombie apocalypse.

Damia's passion for knowledge is present in our conversations. She glides easily through conversing about fiction, nonfiction, and scholarly articles. She is in a graduate program; and shared how, *reading for reading's sake has starkly declined, but at the same time, I read more than I ever have*, but it is not the same kind of fiction or nonfiction pleasure reading she enjoyed in her childhood. She has the desire to collect and complete going back to her childhood. She confessed, *I have a little bit of collectorism in me. So somewhere, there was a poster of the Newberry Medal list, and I just tried hard...anytime I could find one of those books, I would read it.* Along the same lines, she also read the Coretta Scott King Book Award winners. She talked about keeping collector editions of books and having *archival energy* about collecting books she thinks she might need someday. In our second interview, she showed me a stack of books on her desk that she has *been collecting this year*. The eclectic mixture perfectly encapsulated the genres she had been gravitating toward in her adult life.

### **Gifted Reading**

Damia read early and often and felt that she was a reader in childhood, but *as an adult, she no longer identifies as a reader in the same way*. While she admitted that was true and she read a lot, she asserted, *I've always known there were diligent readers out there*. While she knows she read: it did not feel like that should be the qualifier to describe her, but when you listen to her describe her reading journey, it is abundantly clear that she is well-read. *When I was a kid, I would read as many books I could as*

*different as I could. I know that we talk about representation a lot nowadays, but I was reading Norse mythology, Roman mythology, and African American tales that are like mythology. I never felt like I didn't know there was the whole world out there because of books. As an adult, she manages multiple books simultaneously, sharing that she currently is listening to four different audiobooks, though a few of them are The Great Courses<sup>3</sup> from Audible. Damia shared that throughout her life, she does not typically abandon books. She adheres to the philosophy: *I usually finish it because [my] general philosophy in life is I can't complain fully until I finished it. So even if I don't like it a lot, I'm not going to judge it until the end.**

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

As an adult, Damia preferred audiobooks or digital copies of a book to annotate her text and readily reference highlighted sections. She reflected: *Nowadays, I really like audiobooks a little bit because audiobooks are less greedy with my senses. A book needs my hands and eyes and a little bit of stillness, and not too much auditory distraction for me to get into. An audiobook could be in my ear; I can still drive, my feet can still brake, and my hands can steer. So, I appreciated the increased flexibility of a different modality.* She said she often listens to audiobooks when shopping in grocery stores or walking around campus. Damia clarified that she is not particularly tied to any modality of book. She asserted, *My love affair was with stories and knowledge and lessons and learning*

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<sup>3</sup> The Great Courses are immersive educational experiences in eight categories (science & math, history, arts & entertainment, religion, philosophy, literature, business & economics, and better living). There are multiple books within each subsection.

*and words and wordplay and ideas. It's not the smell of an old musty book or the feel of paper on my finger or whatever. It could be in any modality. It's nice to have the paper, but also, I don't need it.*

Damia discussed her evolution when purchasing books as a child. She shared that her mother would give her money for books at the bookstore. She recollected: *I would go to the bookstore and try to buy a book for five bucks because I'd only have the five [given to me by my mom]. And I remember, at the time, valuing books that were longer pages. I'd always tied to what's the most bang for the buck. That's not necessarily how I would value a reading now, but I remember as I kept reading, all of a sudden, now it was like adult books, and now I need to pay like \$10 for a paperback or something like that. And that was just so distressing for me—that increase in cost. When for me, it was just paper.* She later clarified that more pages meant a better book in her youthful nativity, though as an adult, she wanted more *density* in her books with more valuable content.

As a child, Damia relied primarily on fictional books to help her better explore the world beyond what she could readily see. Damia reflected on her lifespan as a reader, *When I was a kid, [reading] was more an escape. Sometimes I was the lonely little military kid. We moved around a lot. I am an only child. Books were always there. Sometimes I would get sent to my room, but I would just read the whole time. So, was that punishment? I don't know. I think that, especially in youth, it was a way to learn about the world...and it was like research. Now at this arc of my life, it's not like there's not more to learn. There always is. But I feel like I got a bead on the world. I can now start to*

*do things better, maybe even start to write myself. It's not like I'm trying to read every little scrap or little bit of information anymore.*

Damia grew up in a conventional Christian household and admitted books provided her access to items that would otherwise have been banned in her house. She related two specific instances. The first was when she was in late elementary. She spoke of her mother initially telling her that she could not read the Harry Potter series as it was about witches. However, years later, her mother asked, *'Have you heard about Harry Potter? The pastor at church just did a Jesus and the Sorcerer's Stone lesson. I think it would be a really cute book for you to read.'* And I was like, *'Ugh! I've been reading them. You've not had the ability to police my reading for a very long time. I read those books.'* Damia's similar realization was also about a lack of policing book selections. *When I was 12, I couldn't go to PG-13 movies or R-rated movies—because, oh, no, you need a parent! But did you know you can just wander those Dewey decimal stacks as a wee child, a wee babe? Armed with nothing but your catalog knowledge and you could find all sorts of obscure stuff.*

Damia discussed reading in elementary and middle school for a program where she would take a comprehension quiz following the book's completion. Damia shared that she had diligently participated in this, sometimes reading a book she did not enjoy to complete the task. She disclosed: *But in high school, there was the test. And I remember one day, I watched Gone with the Wind with the kid while I was babysitting, and I went to the computer lab, and I took my little test. But then I saw there was a test for Gone with the Wind. At that point, I got that video adaptations weren't always accurate, but they*

*aren't 100% inaccurate, either. So, I just cold took the test and did fine, and then I just started cold taking the test and did fine and kept passing. I guess if I'm reflecting right this instant, that is when I started to get to the point where I could just guess the plot, and fiction lost some of its magic. But I think that speaks more about the author. And I know that some authors are more interesting and engaging with my brain, with my gifted brain, than others. As an adult, Damia shared that she has gravitated away from fiction and now focuses mainly on nonfiction. When I asked her why, she said: I think that fiction can be beautiful and immersive. It's not like I can't enjoy a good story. Yet, I'm a little impatient and over it. I get it. You're just talking about random, made up stuff. I can do that, too. I'm more into nonfiction or strategies or things that help me do better and improve explicitly.*

As a child, Damia enjoyed reading comedic books. Her favorite author was Gordon Korman, and she recalled devouring each of those books and would *bust out laughing time and time again*. Damia also enjoyed reading The Babysitter's Club series (which she laments selling the whole thing in its entirety for \$20 as an eBay snafu), the Trixie Belden series, and the Nancy Drew series (except for book number 13, since that was an evil number, so her mother would not let her read it). She read books with boys as the main characters, too. She read the entire series of Encyclopedia Brown and The Hardy Boys. This speaks to her collectionist nature—finishing series outright whenever possible. She reflected in our final interview that reading these *older* books made her feel *out-of-step with her peers*, reading more along the lines of her parent's generation. She admits that the books she read were *Eurocentric* and cultivated a *white-American core* in

her, despite identifying as a woman of color. She loved books with wordplay and puzzles, and she specifically enjoyed The Phantom Tollbooth, The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, and The Westing Game. Her love of these types of books would cause her to question social and environmental choices and supports.

In high school, she enjoyed books by Clive Cussler and the adventure with a historical background to the plot. She admitted that one of the few hardcover books she bought as a teenager was a signed copy of Cussler's Valhalla Rising, which she only found accidentally by *picking up the new release to give it a hug*, and underneath was the signed copy. She enjoyed science fiction fantasy books, specifically Anne McCaffrey's Dragonriders of Pern series and the Talent Series: Damia, Damia's Children, and Lyon's Pride, from which her pseudonym was selected. McCaffrey's books taught Damia a new way to look at the world. The example she shared surrounded the idea of having a baby in the fictional world; there you could stop your birth control in order to have a baby with a different man, then after pregnant, go back to your partner, and live with your baby and partner. She loved the idea of undoing birth control, not the other way around. Damia also discussed enjoying and rereading all the following series: Percy Jackson, The Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, Twilight, and The Golden Compass. She shared she read The Hobbit but never started The Lord of the Rings series because she did not like Tolkien's writing. As an adult, Damia prefers science fiction over fantasy because it is grounded in facts, and she's *curious* about the *science extrapolated* in science fiction.



In high school, Damia went through a Cynthia Voigt phase, reading many of those books, remembering them *deep and profound and really, really striking my soul*. Voigt's books are known for being young adult realistic fiction, dealing with mystery, adventure, racism, and child abuse in her different books. In southern religious private schools, she was exposed to and gravitated toward the poems of e.e. cummings, Ogden Nash, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Ralph Waldo Emerson during elementary school. Each of these poets was known for dealing with social reform topics. It is striking that this is the list of poets shared by Damia off the cuff. She seemed to gravitate toward issues of change, whether it was purposefully or unintended.

Damia shared that her choices to read and not read books were sometimes based on perceptions. Growing up in a Christian household, she talked about reading The Bible multiple times, and only now is she considering rereading it with a critical lens. However, there were books she actively avoided, too. *One of the books I haven't read is Catcher in the Rye. I should probably just read a Spark Note about it because when I was growing up, there was just this whole, 'If you're a serial killer, you have a copy of Catcher in the Rye,' and I didn't want to be a serial killer...or blamed as one. So, I've always avoided reading that book, not because of anything about the story, but because of the [myth] of the story, because it was read by people who did evil acts. Also, I haven't read The Anarchist Cookbook, probably for similar reasons. Will reading this make me guilty of something else?* Books' internal and external narratives can have lasting and lingering effects on readers. Damia related she does not enjoy reading crime stories or law enforcement books, but she did read a few growing up. *I remember reading a book about*

*Charles Manson in high school. It's not really 'law enforcement books,' but I read Tom Clancy novels, too. And I loved King Con by Stephen J. Cannell—a book about a con man. It's more a resistance to 'Serial Killer Books' or 'gory crime.' Instead, Damia would much rather read a book about gardening, and she questioned why so many people, particularly women she knows, were drawn to those genres.*

### ***Reading Environments***

Damia's childhood reading locations were in her room, at school, in the bathtub, and in the back of the car. She recalled reading at night in the car and squeezing in sentences between light posts because she was so desperate to continue reading. Damia also shared that several of her books were waterlogged or had wet pages spent from reading in her bathtub. As a child, she was a teacher pleaser, so she only read in school when it was allowed, but she was never without a book, even remembering to pack books when they went on vacations. However, in high school, that changed. She read in classes, even during lessons. She recalled one experience: *It was a still, sunny, hot, humid day. Maybe there was a fan, but it was so quiet. And the teachers like, 'question.'* And I'm looking at a magazine under my table, my desk, and I look up. Then I look around the room, and the class is just so checked out. And I'm like, 'Answer.' And I go back; I flip another page. I go back to reading it. The teacher is talking. Yeah, it's another question. I look up. Answer. Go back to my book. The third time it happens, she throws me out in the hall, and I'm like, 'What? Why am I in trouble?' But in hindsight it was more than that, right? It was not letting other peers answer. It was having a magazine. There was a

*multitude of reasons she'd want to talk to me. And at the same time, I was bored. I was taking in two streams of data and doing just fine.*

As an adult, Damia reads in a variety of locations. She listens to audiobooks while she drives or in her house while multitasking. Depending on the cognitive lift of the book, she may even do multiple tasks while listening to an audiobook. For example, she shared that she has played video games, cleaned, and laid in bed while listening to an audiobook. She also typically has an audiobook she will listen to with her husband when they take road trips. Damia did discuss that sometimes she still reads paperback books and recently read an entire paperback while with family over a holiday vacation. Still, those moments are few and far between.

### **Damia's Meaningful Book**

Damia's meaningful book is *A Wrinkle in Time*. She bought an untouched, beautiful boxed set of the series several years ago. *A Wrinkle in Time* is about Meg, a high-school girl, her younger brother Charles Wallace, and her friend Calvin who rescue her father, a gifted scientist, from evil forces holding him prisoner on another planet. The book is grounded in science yet contains allegory, with the ultimate power being love's ability to relinquish evil. In the book, those of the light can fight the darkness (evil). Damia recognized that each character was gifted and how that showed differently for each person. She also speculated that Charles Wallace would be profoundly gifted. With awe, she expresses, *Wow, did [L'Engle] know gifted people*. However, she did criticize the recent movie adaptation. *It was beautiful. But where was the science? Where was*

*what made it magical? And it did seem like yet another example of film nerfing and making the story weak, like The Golden Compass films.*

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

Damia did not readily identify with any one character in the book, often thinking she was not as smart as them. Still, she resonated with the story and the elements of gifted individuals within the novel. For example, Damia shared, *there's a moment where the mother talks about how they had done tests with the kids and how the IQ of Meg and Charles Wallace was vaguely higher. I love that they didn't name it because I don't think any one integer number is that important, but also, that range is important. Their IQ was high enough that they could be successful doing whatever they needed to do in the future.* She later reiterated, *because that person did not share many parts of me, I didn't think I was that. I never thought I was as smart as Meg and definitely not as smart as Charles Wallace.* However, she did share that she does now identify herself as profoundly gifted, but on the lower end of that scale of deviation—she knows people who are *even more*.

Damia could see elements where Meg was unlike her very clearly, which made her question herself. *Meg is very emotional. And in the research, emotionality is high with gifted people. I can feel emotion, but I'm not so frazzled and frayed as Meg is. So that also did not resonate with me.* In the novel, Meg can also do advanced-level math by using shortcuts in her head, which has hindered her progress in school since she fails to complete the easy tasks on paper. When I inquired if Damia connected to that, she replied: *No, Meg doing high, nerdy, brainy math did not highly resonate with me. I*

*wasn't like a party trick with that. Just because I did better than everyone else I knew did not mean that that was my greatest strength.*

As a person of color, Damia searched for her identity in books at a young age. She remembered reading Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World, The People Could Fly, and other books that received the Coretta Scott King Book Award; she enjoyed that the characters were African American. The main character in Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World is the only boy in the family, so as an only child, Damia might have resonated with the idea of being *the only one*. She also enjoyed reading African myths and tales. She talked about going down *a rabbit hole*, reading one to the next. Damia also read The Temple of the Golden Pavilion to connect with her Asian heritage. However, she wondered how she was impacted by awareness of the author's mental health and dissatisfaction with systems that fueled the author's public seppuku (suicide). Damia discussed that she looks for main characters who mirror herself. *As a woman who is gifted, I can't handle those ingénue characters with no initiative or thought or independent desire.*

Damia said the character she closest resonates with is Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series. Though Damia knows no character will exactly mirror her, she relayed: *It's not so much I think, 'Oh, that character is me. Therefore, I'm like that character.' I think, 'That character is like me; there's a piece of them that is like a piece of me.' I don't need to do everything else Hermione does. But I do recognize the areas in which we're similar.* Damia discussed a connection with Hermione, who is precocious and always the first person with a raised hand and the answer in their head. Hermione is

an only child. Hermione is also a mudblood, a derogatory term in the novel for someone magical and from a non-magical family. Damia connected with the idea of *being mixed and not whatever everyone else was or was supposed to be*. So though Hermione's race might not have matched Damia, she still connected with Hermione's *otherness*.

As a child, Damia identified with Nancy Drew, who often solved mysteries independently. Then, in third grade, she read Matilda and enjoyed the titular character, who has high intellect reading books at the age of four that are meant for adults and loves books and stories. Damia found gifted young girls and women as characters in her book in her childhood and adolescence reading selections. Though she might not identify with every element of the women in the books, there were opportunities where she could recognize the similarities.

### ***Catharsis***

Damia remembered having emotional reactions to the books that she had read. As earlier mentioned, she laughed aloud at Gordon Korman's books. She recalled she *bawled my eyes out* when reading A Bridge to Terabithia. In high school, Damia discussed hating The Scarlet Letter. She shared she *hated the writing so much. How are we halfway through a chapter, and you've only described a door?* And though she found value in the book's plot, she admitted to enjoying the movie Easy A. She does not like it when people delay getting to the point. Brevity is something that Damia values.

She also had an emotional reaction to reading Farewell to Manzanar. Living in Japan when she read it, she could not comprehend the atrocities of the novel. She revealed, *I think we had to write a two-page little paper. And I wrote a four-page rant*

*and my two-page paper. I was just so hurt by that story. I [realized] I'm here as a military child in Japan. We're taught that Japanese people are our friends now. But in the past, looking at how we treated people that are the same people... I was just so emotionally overwhelmed by the pain we inflicted on others. The other book that caused her an emotional reaction was The Diary of Anne Frank, which showed the horrors of humanity. She said she appreciated these terrible stories, too, as letting me know what happened in the world.*

### ***Insight***

Damia's inherent metacognition creates a natural link to insight (thinking). She reflected on A Wrinkle in Time that she liked Mrs. Who and Mrs. Whatsit *because I think I like weird clothes like that. Or if it feels witchy vibes in a good way.* At the time she read it, she was very embedded in evangelical Christianity, so she almost expected the allegory of good and evil. However, she did like that in the book, there are other ultimate forms of good beyond Jesus, and includes da Vinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Bach, and Madame Curie. Damia also reread the book before our second interview, which opens with a foreword by L'Engle. Damia recalls that, *Madeline said that people said this was too advanced for kids, but [L'Engle] was reading it to [her] kids, and they wanted [L'Engle] to go back to the typewriter and keep writing. So, this idea that [L'Engle] was piloting it on her children who probably were gifted, too. And how that impacted why these books were so advanced and rich for me as a gifted young woman [who was] unidentified and unaware.* The experience of this forward inspired Damia—not only did she understand more about why the book resonated with her as a child, but it

mirrors one of her future aspirations—to write a whole children’s book series that she does not have to *dumb down*.

As a child, Damia also resonated with the namesake character for which her pseudonym was selected. In the novels, Damia Raven-Lyon is a precocious child and describes herself as lonely in a later book. However, it is McCaffrey’s entire Talent Series and The Tower and the Hive Series that Damia resonated with—they opened her eyes to new ways of thinking. She acknowledged, *It’s really interesting reading it with the gifted lens. In the books, these people are so rare and so frazzled but also so emotional and temperamental. According to Damia, In McCaffrey’s books, most people have some level of talent—so it’s normal. But it’s rare for high-level talents to be identified and cultivated.* The characters in the book are parallel to gifted persons; however, in the book, their giftedness makes them very talented and productive in society.

In high school, Damia read Memoirs of a Geisha and loved the book and everything it encompassed. She shared: *I have an affinity with Japanese culture. I was like, ‘Oh, I’m learning so much.’* But when she realized the author was a white man, her perspective on the book had *just changed*. She clarified, *It’s funny because I know his name was on the cover of the book, but I don’t really pay attention to that. But when I did, it was [a moment where I realized] I needed to think about what stories were being told and by whom. Was this the story that should have been told? It just made me question and doubt a lot and reflect on that.* Damia admitted in our final interview that she researched if there was controversy surrounding this topic. She was surprised (and



simultaneously not surprised) to see that there was, including a lawsuit with the author over defamation—so it *vindicated* her feelings about this book. It is crucial to consider the lasting impact of who writes what stories.

### ***Universalization***

Damia could apply some concepts and ideas from the books she had read. For example, although Damia did not identify with Meg in *A Wrinkle in Time*, she used Meg's problem-solving ability. She suggested, *the idea of problem-solving but also trying to navigate taking care of yourself as a little brother. [Meg] had a mom and the missing dad, but she and her brother were trying to figure out life. I think that was important.* In the book, Meg is the only person who can help Charles Wallace defeat evil, and Damia talked about how in many of the books of her youth, the children could overcome issues without the help of the adults in their lives. She shared that she could apply this independence and ingenuity to her experiences.

Damia also was able to apply different characteristics of the characters in these books to her life. She believed that Hermione *showed it wasn't bad to raise my hand. It might be annoying or something, but it wasn't like she was in trouble for it. She wasn't horrendously mocked. I think just that normalized some gifted stuff for me.* From Meg, Damia learned *you didn't have to be good at literally everything*, as the whole first chapter talks about the things Meg is only kind of okay at doing. Damia discussed how many of the stories from her childhood had *stories of kids that had to problem solve, actively problem solve, and engage in figuring out the puzzle and the world around them to get through the story. So, I really don't know, but let's pretend that that gave me*

*perseverance and resilience, and curiosity. I think that I could say I extracted those from the book. And while she says she's pretending, these are likely the book elements that stuck in the back of her mind and stayed with her long after she finished reading.*

Damia admitted she had never made a problem-solving connection before our conversation, but I think these things were *embedded in me. I know I tend to capture alternative ways of dealing with a thing. So, it's just one more tool in my toolbox to draw from the next time I encounter that situation.* I asked her if she had ever intentionally sought a book in childhood to address a need. She responded, *no, there was never, rarely, any strategy to any of this. Nothing ever seemed very focused. As I said, I was just trying to read things that were interesting but weird. My choices were whimsical.* She did say that the one exception was that her mother had a book in her office about two parent dinosaurs getting divorced, and though her parents were not, she understood that books could serve that purpose. But, she stated, *It just felt very, 'Oh, this is something that's teaching me how to act and feel and process and think through feelings and stuff.'* *I thought that was nice, but that was just me picking up a random book one day in her office.* However, as an adult, she shared, *I intentionally seek books that address specific needs.*

### **Reading to Address Affective Needs**

Damia shared that as a gifted person, she is aware of her unique socioemotional needs. She thoroughly knows her boundaries and how the books she reads impact her. As a child, she spent a lot of her time reading, though as an adult, she would rather spend time with other people than sit alone reading. The relevance of what she is reading is

important to her; her time is sacred, and she does not want to waste time on things that are *not very important, even if they are interesting*. She clarified, *I can get overwhelmed and tired with important things. It's not like I only want to read nonfiction. I just want to read stuff that is useful and relevant*. Damia shared that as a teacher, she googled giftedness and came up with Linda Silverman's "The Construct of Asynchronous Development" article, which had a profound impact. As she read the article, Damia revealed, *I just remember bawling. I get it now. It was just so powerful. Seeing an example or seeing that my experience was not that unique in a good way. I am not that special in a great way. There are other people that feel that this way—that struggle to blend in with everyone else that are just a little out of sync with others. So that was an example of something very, very powerful to me*. Through this article, she realized how common it can be for gifted people to struggle with interacting with others because they don't get you.

Damia appeared to face imposter syndrome. She frequently double-guessed her intellect and abilities. Not only did she not feel she was as *smart* as Meg or Charles Wallace, but she also questioned if her intellect was nature or nurtured. She asserted, *Here I am reading Nancy Drew and Encyclopedia Brown. I can problem-solve. I have critical thinking skills. I observe something. I feel like those books did help me develop and hone whatever skill that was*. Even though she found something that challenged her intellect or made her stop and think, as an adult, she wonders if reading those books gave her an advantage over others.

Damia gravitated toward positive books with happiness and solutions. She shared, *My life was easy at home, I had some tension with my mother, but it was very privileged and overindulged. I felt a lot of isolation and loneliness as a child. So, these books and stories were interesting.* Damia's examples illustrate characters who are often lonely but do great things despite their isolation.

Damia talked about feeling different from her peers. Damia discussed that she thought she had a strong intellectual overexcitability (OE), which was evident in her reading style. Damia discussed having an encyclopedia set at home so she could *learn things à la carte* whenever she wanted more knowledge on a particular subject. She also remembered getting *Microsoft Encarta the year it came out, so when I was in fifth grade. It gave me easy access to knowledge.* She often devoured series books, many of which were over ten or twenty books in a series. She admitted she would go down *rabbit holes* reading the same type of book until she reached the end or found a new fascinating topic. Damia was able to *read and learn things above my youthful age of propriety. At the same time, that helped me tackle other stuff.* It was through this reading that she was able to make some early realizations that would not have been forthcoming in her home. One example she shared was reading a book about teenage pregnancy and realizing she would do whatever she could to avoid that outcome. Additionally, as an adult, she is now *more interested in accessing indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge.* Many of her most recent book purchases were about what grows in Colorado and how she can harness Native American wisdom around food, gardening, and ways of knowing.

She dislikes reading books with negative energy, such as true crime novels. She thoughtfully concluded, *When you read something in a book, it's like it exists. This crappy weird thing exists. This weird solution. This abusive relationship. The desire to serially kill people. Putting it in print makes it real, even if it's not on paper. Now someone can read that paper, and it's real, too. They didn't have this idea in their head at all before, and now they can't stop thinking about it. So, I think things that bubble in my head longer are sort of utopian vibes.* She talked about not wanting to luxuriate in true crime books, though she read a few in her teenage years: *Those books don't sit well in my psyche.* Damia's desire to avoid these books is potentially connected with her imaginational and emotional OE. She also has strong reactions to social justice issues brought forth in books.

Finally, Damia shared that it is not necessarily the author's creativity that captures her emotional reaction, but it is due to the *truthfulness of the story.* Damia discussed a connection to the sensual OE. She said when she read about it, she truly understood herself. *I feel like my sensual OE is quite strong. And I would, you know, identify with Princess and the Pea. That thing was in her bed. Get it out! I cannot handle a bit of grit in my bed.*

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

As a general rule, Damia did not participate in discussions of books. She names a few reasons for this. First, her friends were not reading as much as she was, so there was no opportunity to discuss them. Nor had they typically not read the assignment, so it felt

like they could not discuss the book even if she wanted to. Finally, as an adult, she shared that when she first started teaching, there was a feeble attempt at creating a book club, but it fell by the wayside with life's shifting priorities.

Furthermore, she shared that some of her reading was surreptitious. *Some of this was secret reading. So, no, I didn't actively talk about my reading with anyone. It's always about a little bit of private consumption. I did not let my parents know [about] the adult things I was reading. As a child, I was not talking to them about it either. I've always had too much discretion to not accidentally share.* In our final interview, she clarified that sometimes it was *not a secret, but I thought what I was reading would not be interesting to others.* She questioned why someone would want to know everything she read.

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

Damia engaged in metacognition continually. It seemed to be embedded within her as a way of processing all pieces of information in her life. As mentioned early, Damia is returning to her childhood books to reexamine the messaging she received as a child. She admitted, *Sometimes I will think about books, even old books I haven't thought about in a long time. Sometimes something will happen and trigger [a memory]. I can return to a story sometimes, but at the same time, I sort of forget, and I don't retain. That's one of the nice things about fiction: I know I don't have to retain it. I can just go through it. And I do appreciate that break sometimes, especially in contrast with academia.* Damia confessed that she occasionally rereads. *Sometimes, I'll read*

*something, and my brain will snag on something. I'll go back a few pages to figure it out, or I'll see what year it was written.*

Damia's focus in adulthood has been on nonfiction because she wants her reading to be purposeful. She shared, *[if] they aren't, they aren't related to real stuff...it's not interesting. I'd rather read about how to actually make an actual garden than someone eating fake food. Cool, imaginative, and creative. Not real. Can't help me tomorrow. I think I'm just more impatient or more picky with where I'm spending my luxurious time. I could enjoy the story. It's just...I don't know. The cynicism of old age has removed the joy of fiction from my life.*

Damia typically does not annotate physical copies of books. She talked about putting a bunch of *paper shards* throughout the book to mark pages. Damia also disclosed *I don't usually annotate a book because I don't want to mess it up. I will earmark the book pages, though, just a little bit. Just trying not to be gross with that, but that helps me more. If it's mine, I might write more on it as a little archive.* She confessed that she once accidentally wrote in a library book that she thought was hers but felt okay about it because it had already been annotated. She likened it to the Half-Blood Prince in Harry Potter, leaving notes for future readers. She said *sometimes, the notes in the margins are the most valuable.*

### **Brief Analysis of Damia**

Damia's portrait illustrated reading as a form of enlightenment, though she has intersectionality with other participants' reasons for reading. Damia sought enlightenment through her book choices which evolved throughout her lifespan. As a child, she read to

understand the world better and explore different places. She favored diverse main characters, ones that appeared more like her were a bonus but not a requirement. As an adult, she has invested most of her time reading nonfiction to meet her intellectual curiosity and her ever-growing need for new knowledge and enlightenment in a different form. Regardless, her reading has always served the purpose of better understanding herself, others, and the world. Damia prefers audiobooks as an adult for the ease of multitasking, though she retains physical copies of important books. She is aware of her affective needs and addresses them in her book choices, often gaining insight (i.e., thinking) and universalization (i.e., applying) from the books she engages with. Damia utilizes metacognition throughout the entire reading process, pausing to think about books when she is reading and returning to them when she is done. Damia does not discuss her books but still has a deep knowledge of them without it.



## **Chapter Five: Portraits of Gifted Readers in Their 40s**

### **Ariel**

*I read to bring order to life. When there's bad news, wars/crime, it helps to read a story where the author brings the characters to a satisfying conclusion, a complete story that brings order to a chaotic world. Good triumphs over evil. I also prefer stories with a well-written conclusion, waiting on the sixth and seventh books of Harry Potter was awful! Characters died at the end of both the fifth and sixth—evil was gaining in strength! It was so difficult to wait, but the Nineteen Years Later chapter at the end of the final book is one of my absolute favorite parts of the series.*

#### **An Introduction to Ariel**

Ariel sat leaning against the wall with her laptop just out of her reach in a room with low light. We talked on Friday evenings when her work week ended, and her children were occupied with their tasks. Her hair was piled high on her head as she smiled at me in greeting. Ariel is a wife to her high school sweetheart, mother to two children, both gifted readers, and educator of gifted students. She is well-spoken and takes time to consider her responses. Her undergraduate degree is in history, and she has a master's degree. She primarily works mainly with middle-level learners now. Still, she was once an elementary teacher and helped her gifted children through elementary school by providing them with enrichment at home and new learning opportunities.

Ariel is in her 40s and Caucasian. She was formally identified as gifted in elementary school, though she often speaks of an education without challenge, which catapulted her into her passion for working with gifted students. She describes her early education as fraught with tedium and no differentiation, so she always had work completed early. This meant a lot of time for pleasure reading in elementary school. The teacher who transformed her life was her fourth-grade teacher, the first person to take an active interest in her pleasure reading and teach her about genres. This teacher was instrumental in Ariel discovering her passion for literature, which would later shape her life's trajectory—no small feat for a teacher who just took the time to care.

Ariel is open about her challenges with books and the things she loves. Ariel is passionate about historical fiction, which is her most-read genre. In fact, she strays very little from this genre. However, she has a different expectation for how to interact with fiction, nonfiction, and didactic novels. She delineates between the two in a variety of ways. Ariel prefers a reread to a new read most days and cherishes the time among her old friends. She gets so enraptured by the characters, and her imagination is so strong that she vividly creates the story in her head. After reading particularly suspenseful novel scenes, she talks about nightmares, even in adulthood. She knows her boundaries for books, as do her friends when they recommend books.

### **Gifted Reading**

Ariel's passion for literature is undeviating—she loves historical fiction, and that is pretty much it. When asked if she thought about literature differently since we started our conversations, she shared, *No. It has just help me clarify why I love what I love.* She

continued, *I had a really great mentor teacher who, when I would get really upset about a situation, she would say, 'Oh, that's really clear that that's a core value for you. You value honesty, or you value something about doing the right thing, and the situation is conflicting with that, and that's why it's upsetting you.'* And that always kind of helped me realize. I never thought of it that way. But that's why I'm mad because this isn't working. So, I think I kind of look for literature and stories and things that go along with values.

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

As a gifted reader, Ariel talked about her passion for books. Her preference is for paper novels and audiobooks for the ease of multitasking. She mostly reads to escape and because she is invested in the books she selects. Ariel's favorite genre, historical fiction, is prevalent in her most beloved books: Little Women, Little House on the Prairie, Anne of Green Gables, Gone with the Wind, The Secret of Sarah Revere, Pride and Prejudice, Emma, Sense and Sensibility, the American Girl books, and the Harry Potter series. Many of these books were read initially read in her childhood and teen years, and the only book she read solely as an adult is the Harry Potter series. She picked it up when a colleague recommended it to her. She openly admitted she never would have sought out the fantasy series and needed the push from someone else who told her she would love it. She does not readily abandon books. But, she exposed, *I have a compulsory feeling. I have to finish a book; I hardly ever abandon a book. I will almost always read it till the end and then reflect on the novel.*

Ariel spoke about loving the relationships and dynamics among characters in historical fiction. She savored the historical language and the characters themselves. She shared she would frequently pause when reading to stop and reflect on *amazing* words. She does not often reread a passage, instead rereading the whole book. Her love for the genre is tied to her love of history. Ariel recollected, *I read because I really enjoy the characters. Being a person who has a very vivid and strong imagination, I very much imagine the whole story happening as I'm reading; very often, imagining myself in that main character role. So, I enjoy learning about the history while the story is happening. Learning about little details and things that you don't get in history class or that you didn't learn in school because it was the details they skipped over as they didn't have time. You just get the big picture of history. And so, I enjoy all the details that are in it.*

As an adult reader, she has gravitated toward repeat reading of books or children's juvenile literature to stay in a *happy environment*. She has sought relaxing books that do not add to her anxiety. She talked about enjoying characters and having such a vivid and robust imagination that she paints every scene as it unfolds in her mind's eye. She loved the nuances in the books, and her favorite part of the reading was relaxing and imagining herself living in the world. She admitted that she does not always identify with the main character and is drawn to girl protagonists. She shared that she becomes so immersed in living alongside the character that she does not stop to examine the plot or make predictions. Instead, she shared, *I get so surprised by books because I'm in the moment with the characters.*

Ariel connected directly to the characters. She shared that she enjoys reading series and that if she likes one, she buys them all because she knows she will have to finish them. She calls it her *completionist* nature. This is also because she is emotionally connected to the characters. They are who she turned to for advice when reading and who she would try to embody in her own life. She looked for elegant solutions to her life problems through reading. She discussed thinking about characters during and after a book was completed. She shared, *I was imagining the characters all the time, and I always had free time. I always had like free time to think about things in school. Pretty much my whole school experience.* Ariel related stories from her childhood of reenacting her favorite moments from the books. In the summer, she convinced her parents to set up a tent in the backyard, which she imaged was her cabin like the one in the Little House on the Prairie series. She shared, *I would imagine that I was walking through the prairie, and that was our cabin. And I would play that for hours and hours and days and days.*

Ariel was reflective of her process for selecting books. She has been a discerning reader across her lifespan yet relies on others for recommendations. These people are aware of her emotional intensity and how that is reflected in her reading of novels. When reflecting on book selection, she shared, *Someone would say: 'You know, another author that writes like that is...' Or 'now that you should consider Jane Austen...' Or 'you might like...' So, it kind of went from Laura Ingalls Wilder into Louisa May Alcott into L. M. Montgomery. I really started reading all the Anne of Avonlea because I liked the TV show, so I read all of those books.*

Ariel discussed how her book exposure in her teenage years through school has continued to impact her as an adult reader. In her high school AP course, she had to read Beloved and Of Mice and Men, both of which she says she should not have read as a reflective adult. Instead, she would have done that if she knew about advocating for her needs. Ariel shared, *I had a really hard time reading books and still, to this day, will not ever choose to read a book that is overtly violent.* A cloud covered her face as she vividly recalled being haunted by the scenes from the play Titus Andronicus and the images from the movie. She shared that she read it because it was assigned reading, but she questioned why anyone would want to read that play or watch the movie. Those books' violence and awful parts are an antithesis to Ariel as a person.

### ***Reading Environments***

As a child, Ariel spent her time reading in her bedroom, imagining herself sitting in a Victorian house inside a dormer window. She admitted that she did not read in the school library—it was more of a get in, get your book, get out environment. However, she does recall reading in class when she finished her work early, as well as her experience with perceived rules of society: *I didn't often read on the playground because of that image of doing the right thing, and I didn't want to be made fun of, and I was worried about that. So even though I would have rather probably been reading, I would talk to people, or walk around, or swing on the swings in elementary school.* In high school, she still only read at home, though her pleasure in reading declined due to the demands of schoolwork. She remembered sometimes reading for pleasure in the study

hall course she took yearly so she would not have to bring homework home, but still never in the library.

Ariel talked about continuing to read for pleasure in college but with a different mindset. For example, she reminisced, *one of my favorite places was Barnes and Noble as broke college students. Friends and myself would often go to Barnes and Noble on the weekends, and I would be like, 'See ya, I'll be in the children's section,' and they would go to where they were looking. I would pull books off and read entire novels because we would stay for two hours, sometimes three hours, and then put them back on the shelf and go.*

As an adult, Ariel read in different environments for different reasons during the day. Her primary cause for reading was an opportunity to escape. To completely immerse herself in the world that she has picked up. Often, she listened to audiobooks with her children in the car while driving to and from school, which led to conversations about the book. Ariel also listened to audiobooks when cleaning or crafting. She mixed books for pleasure and didactic ones in nature as part of her selections.

### **Ariel's Meaningful Book**

Ariel talked concurrently about two meaningful books in her life. With some trepidation, she professed that Little Women was the book she had repeatedly read the most and ranked it as her favorite book when questioned. Also in the running was the Little House on the Prairie series, the gateway book for her, and the Harry Potter series, which she has read countless times, especially as an audiobook with her children. However, it is Little Women that makes the cut, and the one that she lights up with when

she talked about it. You can see her passion and love for the story she has read over twenty times, from late elementary to adulthood. Each time with a different understanding and appreciation for the story. Her most recent read of Little Women occurred last year with her daughter during their nighttime ritual. Ariel talked about how fun it was to see her daughter process the book and for them to have conversations about it. The biggest one: What was Ariel's favorite character? Ariel refused to tell her daughter to avoid swaying her opinion on the characters—because she loves each character, even when they drive her crazy.

Ariel discussed how Jo evolves in the book. She divulged that the first time she read the book, she could not accept how Laurie and Jo did not end up together. After all, that is how a story should end—with the two destined to be in love and marry. She described being incensed that Jo just wouldn't make the relationship work. Ariel thought to herself as a child: *How could she do that to him? He loves her. I'm sure they could work it out, and it would be fine. They should have gotten married.* In dismay, she echoed, *How could they change that?* As an adult reader and a wife of almost two decades, she revealed, *It's not until I've been older and rereading it this time. Yeah, I kind of see her point. They probably shouldn't have got married.*

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

Ariel discussed Little Women's Meg with a sort of admiration and respect that can only come from the oldest sibling in a family. Meg, her favorite character—she secretly admits, has all these opportunities to shine in the face of challenges, which Ariel



strives toward. Ariel identified with Meg, the oldest sister, who takes care of things while the mother is gone and is in charge of her little sisters. Meg sews, knits, and wants to be married. Early in the story, Meg leaves her family and goes to live with other girls out in society for a few weeks. While there, Meg is placed in a situation where she must decide if she wants to fit in and be complacent as their doll or be herself, with threadbare clothes and all. That moment in the book was decidedly crucial for Ariel and forced her to question: *What are your beliefs, and what do you stand up for?* She continued, *I just felt like I had a lot of that similar experience myself. I would meet people and make friends and sometimes lose friends because I would be pretty strong about standing up for my beliefs about right and wrong and those kinds of things. Sometimes you get outcast for that.*

Meg became more relatable to Ariel as she got older. In the novel, Meg tells her newly minted husband that he can always bring home friends for dinner, and the house will be ready. Meg decides to try canning, and disaster ensues. This is the first time her husband brings over a friend; he comes home to find a wife in tears in the kitchen and a messy house. Ariel shared that she connected with Meg's desire for a perfect home life and that when she read the scene as a newlywed herself, her reflection on those passages changed: *You wanted to be that perfect housewife—dinner on the table every day. I definitely had some of their newlywed experiences. I would reread all of that and definitely connected in a different way.*

Beyond her meaningful book, Ariel discussed how she used the characters in books as an opportunity to imagine herself as a character when she immersed herself in

the book through her imagination. For example, she identified with Mary more than Laura, the main character in the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Ariel identified with Anne Shirley from *Anne of Green Gables*, but only in certain aspects. She loved when Anne used complex and unique words. She enthused: *Anne used cool words that nobody else used. It was so awesome.* However, she was not interested in the long and drawn-out relationship building between Anne and her future husband.

### ***Catharsis***

Ariel quickly remembered her opportunity to have catharsis with *Little Women* and acknowledged: *I always cry when Beth dies.* Ariel engages vividly with her books and creates rich imagery in her head when reading—her emotionality deeply connects her to the book. When Meg’s little sister dies, on some level, it is traumatic, not only for the character for whom Ariel has so much empathy, but also because she can visualize what it would mean in her own family to lose her little sister. Ariel related the story of seeing the Winona Ryder version of the movie as a pre-teen: *I can remember being in the theater. My parents taking our family to the theater was a big deal. We never went to the movie theater, so this was a major part of my birthday or something that we got to go see it in the theater. And the whole time, any time Beth even is kind of sick, I’m hysterically sobbing in the theater, wondering if she’s going to die. I was so sad and upset about it. Knowing it was going to happen, and then they did the scene where she got better the first time, and I was like, okay, not this time. But I was just super emotional.* Ariel’s emotionality as she reads is integral to how she processes the content of a novel.

Not only does Ariel prefer historical fiction, but she primarily gravitates toward books that combine her other passions in life. Beyond her meaningful book, Ariel related a connection to the Quilt trilogy, starting with A Stitch in Time, which takes place around the American Revolution, wherein the story is told from three generations around the quilt pieces. The first book is about three sisters working on different parts of the quilt, eventually separated by the novel's end. The second book is about their children having the pieces and how they interact with each other. The final book is about the sisters' grandchildren finally uniting the quilt together as a family. Ariel has a solid connection to books with tidy conclusions, and this series was indicative of that. Like her mother, Ariel, a self-taught seamstress, discovered an emotional connection with this trilogy. She reminisced, *not only did I love [the book] for the quilting as a crafter and the family mixed in with the history part. But I loved it so much that on a long road trip, I convinced my mom, and we read it on the road trip out loud on paper. It was pre-audiobook. So, the non-driver was reading, and the driver was driving, and we read the whole book on that road trip. That was another really good thing. My mom has often read the books we read so that she could talk with us about them, and she would read with my sister and that sort of thing, too.*

### ***Insight***

Part of the reason Ariel appreciates historical fiction is because roles and duties are defined in those eras. Each person knows their expectations. As someone who always felt different from others, Ariel appreciated the explicitly stated obligations and restraints in the times of the books that she preferred to read. The women know what it means to be

proper. She relates two examples from Little Women and Little House on the Prairie, both from ancillary characters, in keeping with her not consistently identifying with the main characters. Early in Little Women, Meg and Jo go to a dinner party, and Jo's gloves are in tatters, but Meg's are not. The girls each take one of Meg's pristine gloves, and that is their compromise and the juxtaposition between Meg and Jo—between being a proper lady and a more lackadaisical. In Little House on the Prairie, the juxtaposition is also between the two sisters. Mary has perfectly matched hair ribbons, perfect curls, and stays clean. In contrast, her sister Laura gets dirty and never has ribbons. Ariel reflected: *I think that being proper is probably a piece that I've always wanted. I always wanted to be considered proper like that. We don't really have society rules like that. It's not as particular as, 'You have to wear gloves and a hat when you're outside,' but those kinds of things. Just always wanting to know what's expected and what to be.* The juxtaposition between the sisters parallels Ariel's relationship with her sister.

Ariel also connected her notions of love and relationships to books. Her thoughts about navigating the intricacies of relationships were derived from the books she read. These books take place in a simpler time, wherein there is evident knowledge of courting or measures taken by gentlemen to woo ladies. She recollected her own experiences intertwined with Little House on the Prairie: *I was not dating all the time. I was never asked to dance by any boys. I was never part of all of that. And so there was a lot of, 'How does dating work? How am I going to know? How are you going to know if it's the right person?' But I was much more invested in Almanzo and Laura. He drove her from her work back to her family every weekend and did all this extra for her, and that was so*

*amazing*. Likewise, Ariel seemed to be drawn to romantic gestures, which serve as a connection to her marriage to her high school sweetheart.

### ***Universalization***

Ariel shared a lot about herself in the context of using books as a mechanism to help her think and plan out what to say. She shared that her anxiety and introversion caused her to use books often to help her prepare what to say in social situations. Ariel specifically appreciated Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice female protagonist, Elizabeth Bennet's mastery of words to disarm those around her. Ariel shared: *I think a lot of handling situations. There's always the piece of what to say in the moment. Elizabeth Bennet has that snappy comeback. What do you say in the moment when someone's upsetting you or whatever? I'm always on the watch for that because I never know what to say.*

Characters have helped Ariel understand the world and adapt to challenges and loss. Ariel shared, *There have been moments when things have been tough, and I've thought, 'Yeah, but you know, Harry Potter lost both his parents and someone is trying to kill him every school year. You can do this if he can do that.'* That that has definitely crossed my mind. Ariel continued to speak about loss in novels: *Any time they're talking about remembering someone and keeping them with you. I definitely was thinking about my grandparents and, more recently, trying to get ready for...someday, that being my parents.* The last lines said in tears, as she has started preparing for the eventuality of death, which is even more pernicious during a pandemic.

Ariel connected the pandemic and potential loss to the Battle for Hogwarts in the Harry Potter series' final novel as a metaphor for living and the choices we make in the moment. The first time she read Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, her son had just been born, and in the novel, one of Molly Weasley's sons dies. After reading that section, her reaction was, *Oh my gosh, to lose a child right now...I just had to work so extra hard compared to other moms to have him. My situation was different from a lot of moms bringing a baby into the world in that my focus was on not losing the child.* On the day we talked, Ariel and her son read the same part, but her reflection was a little different: *But now thinking of my son as about ready to go to high school and all that—the idea of letting your kids go. And as the mom, the one part that really resonated with me was the whole discussion with Ginny: she was underage, and she had to go back home. She couldn't stay where the battle was. Her parents felt compelled to protect her—she was underage. But the boys, her brothers, can all be at the battle. And Ginny's like, 'Are you kidding me?' It was just that thought of balancing having an older child that would want to contribute or be part of it. You would want them to...help in the effort. But it was so risky and dangerous. Just the idea of balancing life with COVID right now and what risks we take or do not take.*

On one of the occasions when Ariel strayed from her favored genre, she read a book that her sister had recommended to her. Ariel discussed how The Notebook forced her to reflect on her mortality, that of her husband, and the beauty of relationships explored in the novel. The novel is written in both flashbacks of the main characters' initial love story and current day living in a retirement home where the woman has

dementia and does not remember her husband. Ariel gushed: *It's just it's so beautiful. It's so sad at the same moment. I need that to happen. I need myself and my spouse just to go together. I don't want either of us to have to go before the other. Just make that happen. Our kids are grown and on their own, and then just be, 'Today's the day we're out.'*

### **Reading to Address Affective Needs**

Ariel has a particular kind of book and expectations from the book to meet her socioemotional needs. Ariel is open about being emotionally invested in the characters and wrapped up in the story that it becomes almost all-consuming. She talks openly about her perfectionism, anxiety, and emotional and imaginal overexcitabilities (OE) and how they have impacted her as a reader. In conjunction with imaginal OE, she shared having nightmares about passages from The Hobbit after reading the book to help a colleague with lessons. Ariel explicated stated, *I just don't need the scary or the negative or the anxious. And reading needs to be good things. It's happy things happening for families and couples getting together.* She related to her own emotional OE and anxiety when she declared, *I don't like the whole feeling...the anxiety. There will be times where I put the book down and walk away, especially in high school. As we talked about some of those books from high school, I was just like, 'Oh, I can't even handle this. It's so overwhelming.'*

Ariel discussed that this had been a long-standing issue to her, the emotionality of relating and caring so deeply for characters. She recalled reading and watching the animated movie Charlotte's Web as a child and crying hysterically while her younger sister was blasé about the whole experience. Ariel connected to the characters and felt the

sharp emotional loss of Charlotte. In contrast, her sister pragmatically told her that spiders die, that is what they do, and that her babies are her lasting contribution. That logical explanation and the flip of sisterly roles indicates gifted children struggling to maintain control over emotions is very resonating among other emotional OE participants.

Ariel said that sometimes her emotionality causes her to abandon books before finishing them. Ariel picked up the novel ...And the Ladies of the Club, which appeared from an outward glance as the perfect novel for her. However, she realized once she started the book it felt too emotionally fraught, full of divisive characters, drama, and mistreatment. Instead, she criticized, *Just tell me the happy side, and I don't need the I know the bad things happened. I've studied them. That's not what I would do for fun if I'm reading for pleasure. I'm not going to read about something bad happening.* This is indicative of Ariel as a reader, which is why she prefers juvenile literature and rereads literature from earlier in her life. She wanted the chance to escape and enjoy the world, not inhabit more turmoil in another setting.

Ariel fervently avoids the grittiness of the harsh world. When asked about her reading preferences and her desire for a perfect outcome, she related after she finishes a book: *I need the bad guy to die and the good guy to win. It's all worked out, and they solved the problem. I know that's not true in all stories, and that's not always real life. But that's very much what books are for me, which also was why it was easier just to keep reading kids' books.* These books allow her to stay in a contented situation. Even when questioned, she remains determined, *I know at different points throughout my life*



*that people would say, 'Oh, you got to take a harder book than that. That's way too easy.' But I would want to stick with what I knew. For it to be a happy ending, and it all worked out.*

Ariel discussed using her childhood reading to understand her peers and the positive and negative interactions that people have with each other. This provided a framework for her discussions with her family and herself. Ariel recollected using Little House on the Prairie to address school life: *the peer stuff, the social part of that social emotional, through the interactions that Laura and Mary had with the other kids in other towns. How they handle bullies. Nellie was a huge conversation starter for a year. We had lots of conversations about Nellie. And even on our family trip, when we saw the play that this little town put on, my dad, at the end of it, wanted me to go up and talk to the kid actors who were playing the characters, and I had trouble talking to Nellie as an actor because it was Nellie, the mean girl. I knew she wasn't her, but in my head, she was. She was fully immersed in the world, and though she could apply the lessons to her own life, it seemed impossible to engage with the bully of the book and stage when it came time to talk to Nellie.*

Ariel examined her desire to learn more about the authors who wrote her favorite books. She said whenever asked to write a biography as a child, she always picked her favorite authors: Louisa May Alcott and Laura Ingalls Wilder. Over time, Ariel read every book they published. She enjoyed exploring them as people because she felt a form of camaraderie with them. Ariel disclosed: *I did in-depth studies of these authors, finding out about them just because it was the only place for me to enjoy what I liked because we*

*weren't really going in-depth into history in school, and none of my friends were interested in what I was interested in.* Her kindredness to these authors and the eras they wrote about potentially served as a catalyst to her selection of a major when she entered college.

Ariel used books to address her being an introvert, something she said she must deal with daily. She needed to think about what she had to say or what she should say. She admitted she struggled with being an introvert her whole life and that books helped her determine what to say and when. She confessed, *Everything I say, I have thought about it in my mind before I say it out loud. So, oftentimes I'm looking for, 'What do they say when this happens? What do characters say? How did they handle those situations?' Those kinds of things. It's definitely something I've looked for as I read in books. That's the surprise moment for me: 'Whoa, I can't believe the character said that or thought of that right in the moment.'*

As an introvert, she often felt that though she had friends, they did not understand her or like the same things that she did. She related to the titular Anne of Green Gables because of the same reason. Ariel conceded, *I only had one or two close friends. I wasn't with lots of friends and people around me. So definitely, when I read stories like Anne of Green Gables, I was like, 'It's okay that she was different and only had her one friend, and she didn't necessarily get along with the other people.'* Ariel felt a kind of kindred spirit with literary characters with whom she could see her similarities and differences.

Ariel spoke about a feeling of isolation and turning to books for comfort. She divulged: *Sometimes, it was because I didn't feel like I fit in. The people around me and*

*adults around me described me as often 'an old soul' or that I was 'mature beyond my years' or, you know, one of those kinds of things because I wasn't interested in the things that my peers were interested in. So, in an isolating environment, Ariel turned to literature to find guidance and solace. Literature was a form of escape and an avenue to understanding herself and others.*

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

Ariel shared that she enjoyed some discussions when she was a younger reader, but only with adults. The nature of her discussion was more *inquisitive* or an opportunity for her to process extreme emotions from the book. She jokingly confessed that her poor mother carried the brunt of her discussion about books. Ariel clarified that her conversations were, *Not really for understanding. Sometimes for understanding, but most of the time, I wanted more details or to know, 'Would it have really been like that? Why would they have done that?' Or, if there was any part that was sad or very emotional and I was emotional from imagining and being in that world, sometimes I needed to process the extreme emotions of it.*

Ariel continued to reflect on when she did discuss a book with someone, it was about the complexities of the era in which it was written. She remembered returning to her fourth-grade teacher when she was in fifth grade to talk more about the Little House on the Prairie series. She admitted, *I wanted to have an in-depth conversation on how difficult it was for the pioneers and whether it was a good choice or a bad choice. Should they have set out and done all those things? I wanted to talk about history and facts and*

*what I was learning about, and what I was interested in, and nobody else I knew wanted to talk about those things.* The adults in her life served the purpose of meeting her inquisitive nature and intellectual needs.

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

Ariel discussed her connection to books and her metacognition that occurred concurrently as she read them or occasionally when she stopped reading to think about something that had happened. As aforementioned, she frequently had to take breaks from books when they were too emotional for her. She also discussed her long-lasting memories of books and often taking time to think about a book during a read or long after she is done. She even recalled the differences from page to screen adaptations: *Any time a book has been made into a movie, I can pretty much list off every single detail they left out. And even comparing movies between others. Even if I haven't read it recently, I could still say, 'Oh, they didn't...'*

Beyond traditional literature, Ariel explored music lyrics to engage in metacognition. For example, she reminisced, *I've been looking really closely at the lyrics of Encanto for a couple of reasons: One, learning them because I am not as fast as learning them as other people in my home. And also just like appreciating the Spanish and thinking about the translations and how songs are translated, but then they change the words to keep the rhyme scheme. And why did they do that?* Ariel used metacognition in her most recent nonfiction didactic read, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. While reading, she said she reflected on understanding and universalization. Ariel revealed, *It's just interesting and to think about*

*people I've interacted with at work and realized, 'Oh yeah, that's why you're a bad leader because of this one.' Or, 'Oh, that's why you're a good leader, because you do this.'*

Regarding annotation, Ariel clearly delineates between fiction and nonfiction books. Her fiction books must remain *pristine*, which she reflected was likely a perpetuation of requirements for her school textbooks to remain clean and unmarked. Not until she entered college did she learn about annotating books, which started with nonfiction. This application endures, as she heavily annotates those books when participating in two or three professional book studies a year with her colleagues. She disclosed: *I write all over it. And I'm better about annotating, like, 'Yes, I agree with this!' And making my comments.* She continued, *In more nonfiction-type stuff, it's easy to write in. It's kind of one of those, 'Oh, that would have been a cool thing to do.' I wish someone had suggested annotating to me earlier. I would have probably had a thousand journals.*

### **Brief Analysis of Ariel**

Over her lifespan, Ariel has read books searching for decency in an indecent world. Her choice of novels is necessitated by good triumphing over evil and suitable endings. Ariel's book selections have remained primarily static throughout her lifespan, as she is the only participant who continually chooses to reread novels rather than engage with new ones. Ariel has always gravitated toward historical fiction satisfying her intellectual OE and her passion area. Her metacognition is ever-present in her thinking about the characters, their choices, the implications of those choices, and real-life

connections to those novels. In adulthood, Ariel has relied upon audiobooks as her primary form of reading to allow her to multitask. She continues to address her affective needs in her book selections and often has emotional reactions (i.e., catharsis) to reading novels. Ariel very rarely discusses novels with people, instead choosing to think about books both in the moment and after she concludes reading.

### **Rachel**

*If you get in a rough patch, it seems like everything's going wrong. Life can kind of beat you down, it'll make you a little negative. Ishmael changed the way I do things. When you're looking at someone else doing similar things, then you see a reflection in your own life. The aunt in the novel is mean and negative. The aunt speaks harshly to Ishmael, but he was very forgiving and nice about it. Ishmael understood that her rough life impacted the way she spoke to him. He didn't take anything personally. The novel made me want to try, consciously, to handle things a little differently or respond differently.*

### **An Introduction to Rachel**

Rachel sat on her living room couch, talking to me while her children played upstairs. Rachel, who identifies as Caucasian and in her 40s, was informally identified as gifted. She grew up in rural Colorado and was sure that no one was identified as gifted when she was a child. Our meetings were in the evening when her husband was home from working on their ranch. She is a mother of four, two girls and two twin boys, who she fostered and adopted. Her daughter was identified as gifted, and through that identification, she better understood herself and realized that she was gifted, too. Rachel

has a bachelor's degree in plant genetics and breeding and a master's degree in plant pathology, but now she spends her days as a stay-at-home mother and, more recently, a homeschool parent. She shared, *I always said when I had kids, I wanted to stay home. So, when I had my first child, I quit my job and stayed home. I never wanted to homeschool. But it's something I feel I have to do. My kids are so much happier than in public school.*

Rachel taught herself how to read before kindergarten and has always loved reading. She talks about going down *rabbit holes* of reading, wherein she will read an entire series or an author at a time or within a genre. Rachel regularly reads three–five books simultaneously, switching to different books at different times of the day. She squeezes reading time in whenever possible, as she can only read books on paper. Rachel shared that she has recently engaged with two audiobooks in the last year. The first time was in the car with her children; they were Beverly Cleary books. She recalled, *I found my mind wandering. Though, my husband and children were engaged in the story.* In March 2023, Rachel and her husband listened to an audiobook version of 11/22/63, and they were both really engaged. She admitted: *It was a random pick because I was weary about reading a Stephen King book—but it wasn't horror—it was time traveling. It hasn't been too bad. We just haven't finished it yet because it's so long.* Rachel is considering trying more audiobooks when completing outdoor tasks around her house to continue engaging with literature in a different form, but she still prefers physical paper copies.

Rachel gravitated toward an eclectic array of books, primarily because of her style of reading collections at a time but is currently reading classics. She keeps a physical paper copy of a log to keep track of the books she reads and if she liked them. She also

has a poster on the wall and a physical book accompanying it, 1,000 Books to Read Before You Die: A Life-Changing List, which she is working through the list. In 2023, Rachel is completing A Classic Reading Challenge on a Tea and Ink Society's website. These books provided her with an opportunity to *read a book I normally wouldn't pick up*. And the added bonus is that some books overlap between these reading challenges. She has only read from these kinds of lists in adulthood. However, she reflected in high school, she gave herself a *one-person summer reading challenge, trying to read more books than I did in the previous month*. Rachel also spends a lot of time reading the books she will use as part of a curriculum for homeschooling her daughters, as her boys are still too young for school, and books to help her be a better homeschool parent.

### **Gifted Reading**

Rachel shared that she has always been a *fast reader*. She reads about two books a week, though that number has changed throughout her life. As a child, she read a lot and read series and books repeatedly, almost exclusively fiction, though, in adulthood, she leans more toward nonfiction. Rachel divulged, *When I was a kid, all I read was fiction. I think I probably thought nonfiction was boring. Once I became an adult, I started to gravitate toward nonfiction, but I still prefer fiction, especially historical fiction*. She shared that she loved rereading the Anne of Green Gables series, the Sarah Plain and Tall series, and the Little House on the Prairie series—that she gravitated toward Old West books. She shared that she was in late elementary when she read and kept reading those books repeatedly. She loved the characters and did not want to leave their worlds. Rachel related to her childhood with a retrospective look: *I liked those Old West stories. I don't*



*know if it was because they have to figure things out on their own. I guess they were really self-reliant. Maybe I felt like that a lot as a kid because I was the oldest. If I wanted to learn how to do something, I realized I had to do it on my own. And I've come to realize this has occurred throughout my life. For example, my mother did not teach me Spanish, though she is fluent. I had the desire and drive to learn, but no one would help, so I had to wait for the class to be offered to me to learn Spanish. More recently, I had to figure out how to homeschool my children during a pandemic, and every person I contacted never responded.*

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

Rachel read in school to escape because she did not like school; reading allowed her to glimpse different lives. Rachel also struggled with school dynamics. She asserted, *School wasn't challenging...just the school politics and the cliques. Middle and high school weren't that enjoyable for me, and where I went to middle school started in fourth grade.* In high school, Rachel discovered thrillers and began reading those, though she admitted the closest to that kind of book she read when she was younger was the Nancy Drew series. However, craving something different, she began reading all the books by John Grisham and Tom Clancy. She pondered, *I don't know how I found those authors, but I remember both of those authors, the first books I read by each of them. I read The Firm by John Grisham and The Hunt for Red October by Tom Clancy. I don't know if someone recommended them to me...I'm not sure how I got into those, but I was up all-night reading at midnight, 1:00 in the morning. They were suspenseful. In the Tom Clancy novel, I liked how they have multiple settings in different countries, and as you*

*read, you think they are separate, but they all come together in the end in a big, suspenseful way.*

A common theme for Rachel was that she felt like she read fiction to escape and nonfiction to learn. She even shared that she sometimes felt like she is escaping into nonfiction when she learns about a new subject or topic. However, as an adult, she rarely rereads a book, sharing, *There's so many new books that I want to read that I get excited about, and then I don't really have time to reread because I'm reading to read new books.* She elaborated, *As an adult, I seem to be going down rabbit holes all the time. I'll be reading one book, and then I'll hear a podcast or something, and think, 'Oh, I should look into that' or 'Oh, that's really cool,' and start reading new books down a different path. Sometimes, I feel surprised when I look back to where I started and where I ended up after exploring topics that arise while reading.*

However, in college, Rachel spoke about her first academic challenges and not having time for pleasure reading. She recollected, *When I was in grad school, I didn't read for fun at all because I was reading a lot of schoolwork. So, I remember when I got done with grad school, and I read a book for fun. But it felt weird and unproductive.* In her second interview, she talked about feeling guilty about reading for pleasure following college: *I remember when I had defended my thesis, I read a book my sister recommended. It felt weird because I was reading without a purpose...it was just for fun. It had been so long since I actually sat down and read a book for fun. It just felt different.*

Only now, after her children and her life are more settled, has she begun reading again for pleasure. She reads the classics and prefers nonfiction, which helps support her

as a homeschooling parent. She admitted: *In high school, I probably avoided classics. I read A Tale of Two Cities, the Charles Dickens' book. I remember being kind of bored with it in high school.* She did admit that lately, she sometimes enjoys rereading books for ease of mental capacity or the opportunity to take her back to her childhood. She divulged, *Sometimes, if I just want something easy to read and I don't really want to think a lot about it, I'll reread something from my childhood. I was big into Nancy Drew as a kid, and I have recently found all her books on a discount website for two dollars a book. When they become available, I buy them. I almost have the whole set. So, when I'm feeling overwhelmed, I read a simple Nancy Drew that doesn't require a lot of thinking. I have also recently read some of the Anne of Green Gables series, allowing me to return to my childhood innocence.*

Rachel seemed to enjoy reading for a purpose. She does not like to read romance books, the only genre she actively avoids. She clarified: *I don't want a book with a lot of romance and love stories. I do avoid those. I don't want books that make me cry, so I avoid those, but sometimes I'm surprised by a book.* When I asked her why she avoided that genre if it made her uncomfortable, she divulged about sad books, *I guess if I'm by myself and no one knows, then I'll read a sad book on my own. It won't be a big deal because no one will see me crying.* She does not actively seek out these books but typically will read them if she starts them. She related a story of reading a Stephanie Plum series of books that the local librarian suggested because they are constantly checked out. So, she confessed, *I read that one, and I kept reading it, thinking surely, it's*

*got to get better. And I finished the book, and I felt like that was the biggest waste of time, and I got nothing from that book.*

Rachel gravitated toward books with subsistence. She wanted a story that made her think or challenged her. Starting in adolescence, she seemed to shift this discerning view of selected novels. However, the genres of the books would change from fiction in adolescence to mostly nonfiction and classics in adulthood. She clarified, *When I was a kid, I don't think I really enjoyed history as much. I thought it was boring. I think that's just come later as an adult. But I always was interested in people. I've got a lot of World War Two books. I'm interested in that whole era because I am just trying to figure out people. I wonder, 'Why? How could they do stuff like that? If that happened now, what would I do? Would I have the courage that some of these characters show? How would I handle that?'* Rachel seems to want to explore the plight of humanity through different eras and perspectives from around the world.

### ***Reading Environments***

Rachel seemed to read whenever and wherever she could. As a child and teenager, she read at home and school mostly. Typically, she only reads books in paper form, though she is considering trying another audiobook after her most recent success. As an adult and parent, she shared: *I will read wherever I can get a few minutes, so sometimes I'll read in my bedroom, on the couch, or in the car. I usually have to sit in the car and wait for my daughters to finish their dance class, so I'll read then. My husband also makes fun of me because I leave my house early, so I have an extra 15-20 minutes to read in my car while waiting to pick up my sons from preschool.* Reading continues to be

an escape for her, squeezing it into her busy days. She is also reading to model reading behavior for her children. She participated in the 1,000 books before kindergarten for all of her children, so she likes to have books all over their house. She talked about keeping books on her bedside table, upstairs, and downstairs.

### **Rachel's Meaningful Book**

Rachel's influential book was Anne of Green Gables, the story of an unwanted orphan who overcomes the odds. Anne's precocious nature endears her to stay with Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, two siblings who initially only wanted a boy to help on the farm. Rachel talked about identifying with Anne's precocious nature as a child, *Before kindergarten, I taught myself to read. When they tested me at the start of kindergarten, I was at a fifth-grade reading level.* Anne, the titular character, also teaches herself to read before our introduction to her and is an avid and fast reader, just like Rachel.

Rachel shared that she is an introvert and connected with Anne's feelings of isolation and loneliness. She divulged: *If there were characters that felt more alone, I could identify with them. In the case of Anne, she has one good friend, but she still has other kids who tease her, and she has to bounce from home to home.* Since Rachel grew up in rural Colorado, she could readily identify with Anne's feelings of isolation at the farm and in her housing situations before the novel's beginning.

Rachel also revealed an experience on a school bus where she handled the situation opposite Anne. In Anne of Green Gables, Anne is bullied by a boy who calls her "Carrots" as a derogatory remark about her hair, so she refuses to return to school.

Rachel, when called a name, had an opposite reaction. She remembered, *When you are in school and around all those kids, everyone gets picked on at some point. I remember a specific boy that rode my bus called me a brown noser. I just kind of ignored it. I was the opposite of Anne. I just smiled and pretended I didn't hear what he said and ignored him. The bully did not expect that. He tried to press my buttons, but I wouldn't let him.* So, Rachel could think and apply a different reaction than the one she had read.

Rachel also has a kind of tenacity that Anne exhibits in the book. She does not give up, even when people question her wherewithal to continue. She shared a conversation she had just had with her daughters, *There are going to be a lot of times when people ask you, 'Why would you want to do that?' Or 'You can't do that... you won't make it.'* Perhaps, for a woman who fell in love with a book about an orphan girl finding a home, it is unsurprising to find out she has been a foster and adoptive parent. She continued, *When we started fostering, there were a lot of people that were, 'Why?' My mom's first words were, 'You better have a good lawyer.'* So, there were a lot of people that weren't quite supportive, but it all turned out just fine. Like Anne, who persevered, so has Rachel, who, with her husband, created their own business, all while Rachel homeschooled their children.

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

Rachel recently read a book that resonated with her and her daughters as part of a curriculum unit. Rachel revealed: *I recently read Where the Mountain Meets the Moon by Grace Lin. It's a really good book, and my 12-year-old was into it, and even my seven-*

*year-old was into it. They wanted to keep reading it, but they were into the book for the girl—to see if she could do what she set out to do in the book. I was reading it for a different reason—I was getting more from the mom’s perspective. The family is in poverty, and they don’t have a lot. They spend all day working in the rice fields and don’t have a lot to eat. Minli, the main little girl, is the only child in the family. The dad wants to tell stories, and sing songs, and kind of have fun, and the mom keeps coming up and saying, ‘Knock it off. That’s not going to do anything. Stop singing.’ They eventually get a pet goldfish and will feed it a few grains of rice, but the mother gets frustrated that they have to share the rice with the fish. The mother was just mad constantly. And then, when Minli left to find riches and was gone for quite a while, the mom came around and said, ‘I shouldn’t have been so mean. I should’ve let them sing and tell the stories.’ The mother was sad and regretful. It was another one of those times when a character is stuck in the moment, and life beats them down for so many years. It’s easy to be negative. This passage spoke to Rachel’s intentionality as a reader—as someone looking for meaning in the text beyond what is straightforward. She later revealed that she could sometimes identify with this idea of being stuck in the moment and the guilt of being negative with her children.*

### ***Catharsis***

Rachel occasionally discussed connecting to a book so profoundly that she had an emotional reaction reading it. For example, in her childhood, she discussed the reading of Stone Fox. She remembered her teacher using the book as a read-aloud; though she could not recall the book’s details, she did remember her teacher needing a box of Kleenex.

Rachel vividly recalled her teacher crying while reading the book to the class. After class, Rachel checked out the library book to read at home. She recollected, *I remember bawling because of a dog dying. A lot of dogs died. I remember my mom questioning, 'If you knew it was sad, why did you reread it?' My response was that I thought my teacher was overreacting and that I wouldn't be sad. I really did not know why, though.* Rachel needed to experience the book alone and cried only during this time. She could not readily recall a similar emotional reaction to a book in junior or high school.

As an adult, Rachel shared having an emotional reaction to I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade while she read it to her daughter. She remembered, *I was trying to read it aloud to my daughter, and I couldn't even finish reading because I was crying. And then she started crying.* She shared that it was unexpected, as she had never heard of the book before, and she did not expect an emotional reaction, and the majority of the book was *fine*. However, the end is when she experienced her emotional limit. She stressed, *It wasn't until the end because...the horses aren't supposed to die or that one specific horse wasn't supposed to die, so I guess we were pretty attached to the characters in that one, too.* This connection to characters with emotional reactions to their choices and lives is something frequently seen with gifted readers.

The final example of catharsis shared was of a book that her cousin wrote about her life that Rachel edited for her. In this book, her grandmother is a character. She recalled lots of fond memories of being at their houses. She reminisced, *that one made me laugh out loud in some parts, and some parts made me cry. It starts off with my grandma in the nursing home, so I put off reading it because I did not want to cry.*



*Eventually, I read it and it was fun to read her childhood perspective.* The book allowed her to experience life with a different lens, though the subject was closer to her than most of the characters she typically reads.

### ***Insight***

Rachel shared she has always loved thinking about books. They provided her with a space to learn and experience new things. She gravitated toward books with strong, resilient central characters as a child and young reader. Rachel reflected on her childhood reading, *They all seem to have a common theme of a kid having to learn how to do things for themselves, and they're all successful. It was inspirational.* Rachel discussed that growing up in the country could feel isolating, and books allowed her to escape. She described, *When I was a kid, we didn't do a whole lot. I did a few things here and there. I did 4H, but for the most part, my parents said they didn't have money for gas, so I didn't do a whole lot. Books gave me the opportunity to see other people's worlds and what they've done with them. It gave me a chance to get out of my own little box in my house when I was a kid and allowed me to see what else could be out there. What else other people do?*

In adulthood, Rachel uses nonfiction as a way to gather new information. Since beginning to homeschool her children in 2020, she has used a lot of books as a resource. She shared realizing there was a commonality among other parents, though what she was experiencing felt isolating at the time. She scrutinized, *When I'm reading about homeschooling and how other parents are doing it, it makes me realize that everyone else has the same problems and thoughts. I don't feel so alone.*

## ***Universalization***

The perfect example of universalization, or application, comes from Rachel's recent read, The Lazy Genius Way: Embrace What Matters, Ditch What Doesn't, and Get Stuff Done. This book impacted her perspective as a woman with multiple roles in her family. Rachel recounted from the book, *The Lazy Genius Way*, *her motto is to be lazy about the things you don't care about and be a genius about what you want to care about. So, she wants to make homemade bread, and that's where she chooses to be lazy. So she'll spend her time doing that, and then with the other household chores or things she doesn't care about, she'll be lazy. It is a good book.* Rachel talked about wanting to reread it to get more out of it the second time and how she could apply it to her life and her choices as she navigates the different elements of her day.

Along with this comes her common connection in adulthood with women who are doing their best despite their struggles. Rachel related a very personal struggle with her four-year-old twin sons and how she felt like the characters in the book Ishmael and Where the Mountain Meets the Moon have helped her reframe how she engages with them. She admitted, *I feel bad sometimes because of my reactions to how different it is parenting little boys. There are days when it seems like everything they do, they just cause chaos, makes messes, or break things. When it starts piling on, it's a lot. The other day, I got frustrated with them for doing something they didn't mean to do, and they were sorry, but I was still stuck in that moment—the moment where you've been doing this over and over and over. Then, I try to remember how those characters handled the situations. Sometimes, I'm not successful, and sometimes I am.* The struggle of

motherhood was a common topic of our conversations, and Rachel was hesitant to forgive herself for her frustrations raising her children. However, motherhood is a universal theme in novels. It typically provides an opportunity to illuminate the struggles of mothers or caregivers as they navigate the challenge of juggling many things simultaneously.

### **Reading to Address Affective Needs**

Since Rachel was not formally identified as gifted, she learned about it through the identification of her child in elementary school. After attending a homeschool conference virtually, Rachel recalled that a speaker discussed gifted characteristics and felt like she understood herself for the first time. Rachel purchased both of the speaker's books, and *I just really saw myself in those compilations of people she shared*. Rachel said that up to that point, she had never thought of herself as gifted, but through those readings, she better understood herself and her daughter.

In our second interview, Rachel discussed books differently. She shared that she had thought about books differently since we first spoke. She was much more reflective of the books she had been reading and more cognizant of the subconscious connections she was making. Rachel discussed reading Mommy Burnout: How to Reclaim Your Life and Raise Healthier Children in the Process and how it had impacted her, which will parallel earlier elements of this portrait. She conceded, *I've got so much going on. And probably all the worry and anxiety I've got with everything...I fear it is being put on my kids. I'm just trying to slow down and calm down and not project that onto them. Although, I think they still pick up on it.*

Rachel shared that she's an introvert, and school gave her anxiety, so it was easy to turn to books instead throughout her K-12 education. To reiterate, Rachel read as a form of escape in childhood, as she still does occasionally as an adult. Rachel reflected: *I don't know if I really sat down and thought too hard about if I really felt like any character or if I saw similar characteristics. With all the tension I probably had as a kid...reading was more of an escape for me. That was something I could do by myself and get away from everything else that was going on.* As an adult, she could more readily identify with characters, as mentioned earlier in this portrait. Rachel used the plot of books to try on new worlds and lives. However, throughout her lifespan, Rachel also uses books as an opportunity to learn new things. In elementary, Rachel remembered teaching herself how to play instruments from books. She admitted, *I played the flute in band, but my sister played the sax, so I taught myself to play the saxophone with my sister's music books. Then, I taught myself how to play the keyboard with small books from the music store with famous songs.* Rachel used books to meet her intellectual and emotional needs of childhood—allowing books to provide her with new knowledge and refuge from a complex world.

As an adult, Rachel seems to be using books to meet her intellectual need in different ways. As mentioned, she enjoyed reading books that relate, expand, and challenge her brain. Rachel relied on books to help her in the various domains of her life. Still, she also seems to use books to meet her intellectual needs with books that relate to the field in which she has collegiate degrees: *Recently, I read Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA by James Watson, which is about how*

*they found the structure of DNA. I have Rosalind Franklin's book downstairs, who helped find the structure of DNA, but I haven't read that book yet, but I read about Barbara McClintock. She was always interesting to me. She was the one that found the transposons, the jumping genes. They're not transferred in the typical way you think; they can jump from segment to segment.*

Rachel also appeared to have elements of an emotional OE. She talked of reading books in childhood that made her cry, though she seems to avoid those types of books in her adolescence. In adulthood, she is confronted with them again as she reads to her children. Rachel divulged when discussing her compassionate daughter, *I think I can see that in myself, too, with animals, I guess just...really empathetic. You don't want to treat animals badly, or something happens, if they die or get hurt, it is upsetting to me.* The two examples of catharsis she shared had to do with the death of animals, which seems to be a soft spot for Rachel.

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

Rachel does not engage in discussion. Rachel shared, *I know when I was a kid and all through high school, I didn't discuss books with anyone. I took a class called Great Books, and I was all excited because I was going to be reading books, but it was a discussion-based class, which I didn't know. I was a pretty introverted, shy, quiet person who didn't want to talk. I think I ended up with a C, but probably out of pity.* So, even in a class where a discussion was paramount, she still refrained from engaging with peers about the books they were reading together. Instead, she took the meaning from books

internally. She recently joined a local book club group in the summer of 2022; most parents are homeschooling their children, too. There is limited discussion, but it does provide an outlet for conversations about books. Rachel shared, *In the group, we've spoken a little about the books. For three of the books, we watched the movie, so that was the 'discussion.'* *It's pretty small, and they get off track a lot, but there is a little bit of discussion.* Additionally, she said that she sometimes, in passing, mentions things she reads to her husband, but *I haven't found anyone with whom I could actively discuss the books I'm reading for myself.* She clarified in our final interview that the addition of the book club had provided an opportunity. Still, it is just one book, and typically discussions are limited and basic comprehension items. She admitted, *It is hard for me to find people who want to discuss things to the depth I want to.*

Rachel confessed that she did try to participate in an online discussion group with the Read Aloud Revival website. She recounted, *I tried the Mama book club, so that could have been an avenue for me to discuss online, at least with other people. I thought it would be an opportunity to talk about the book. Some books are classics to discuss, and some books relate to homeschool curriculum. It feels like it's a 50/50 split.* Rachel clarified, *I have not actively gone onto the forums to discuss the books, but I will watch the videos or read the extra resources when they are interesting to me.* So even in adulthood, with a purpose behind a discussion group, Rachel still felt a lack of value in discussing the novel with others, especially on deadlines.

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

Rachel enjoys reading for a purpose, which can vary by the task she tries to achieve, which the book itself can mostly surmise. Rachel felt she employed more metacognition when reading as an adult and college student than when she was a child. She reflected that she read as a child to escape and enjoy the plot as it unfolded. She invested in the characters and what would happen next to them. *It was more reading for the pleasure of reading.* Rachel shared she just read through quickly to find out what happened.

Rachel spoke of visualizing the story in her head. She clarified: *If I get engrossed enough in the story, I feel like I'm there. Sometimes, I feel like I have to adjust back to my life from the environment of the characters when I stop reading.* This was true for her across her lifespan. She shared, *I'm sometimes annoyed when my kids or outside noise prevents me from getting into being with the characters.* However, in college and adulthood, she actively engages in metacognition throughout reading. She professed, *As an adult, I think I do pause more.* Initially, she shared that she did not engage in metacognition early in her nonfiction reading for her master's. Then she took a class that changed her use of metacognition. She recalled, *The professor asked us to examine the validity of the research. We had to write five questions for each weekly article. After that class, I could look at things with a more critical eye and think about what I was reading while I was reading it with questions in my mind.*

Rachel vehemently opposes marking up her books in any form, instead opting for a separate piece of paper to annotate. She would prefer her books remain pristine

whenever possible. She admitted, *I want books to be nice and pretty. Don't crease the spine. Don't dog-ear the pages. If I wanted to write or make notes, I get a piece of paper specifically for that.* She does not like reading books that have been annotated, either. She confessed: *There was one time in college I got so mad at buying these textbooks, and everyone underlines, stars things, and highlights. And what they highlight and underline is not important. I remember getting mad, and I'm like, 'Okay, fine, I'm going to highlight.'* And there was one book where I just highlighted a whole bunch of stuff. But that was the only time I'd done that. This slight act of revenge and rebellion was her only memory of actively annotating a book. It is important to note that Rachel disagreed with the highlights and underlining in this book, and she felt that it was so inaccurate that the best way to correct it would be to highlight everything. This speaks to a level of perfectionism and her discernment. Rachel shared that she did purchase book darts, clarifying, *they are really thin piece of metal that is an arrow, and it allows me to mark passages I like. The darts do not indent the page, so it keeps them nice when I want to remove them.*

Finally, Rachel shared about a time when she was forced to unintentionally discuss a book with a previous reader through annotations in a library book. She remembered, *I checked out a library book a year ago from a different library in the next town over. And that copy of Fahrenheit 451 was marked— there were underlined parts and questions in the margins. I kept thinking, 'Why did this person do this?' As I was reading it, I thought it was a little annoying. I didn't want to hear this person's thoughts about how she was interpreting the book and what she was underlining. I kind of just*



wanted to read it on my own. Even with an opportunity for indirect discussion with an unknown reader, Rachel still felt uncomfortable and frustrated, as if they were forcing their opinion on her.

### **Brief Analysis of Rachel**

Rachel's form of reading was intentionality and was evident in her novel choices and her systematic ways of working through novels using lists cultivated by other people. These lists force her exposure to books she would not actively select otherwise. Rachel's reading is resourceful, which allowed her opportunities to search for answers to questions and better help her with her obligations. Her curiosity compels her to read novels and to gain new insight and understanding from them, along with knowledge. Rachel used reading as a form of escape in both fiction and nonfiction, allowing that new knowledge as a type of escape to her. Rachel is the only participant who kept an active list of the books completed and was the only participant who did not use audiobooks as a regular form of reading. However, in the year that elapsed between the second and third interview, Rachel had listened to one audiobook. She was going to try another because she found the ability to multitask with audiobooks practical. Rachel primarily engaged in metacognition when she takes a break from her novels, but often returns to them for additional insight over weeks, months, and years.

### **Pikel**

*The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles graphic novel was the first time I was willing to break the rules. I just thought it was so cool when it first came it out. I was scared buying it at the store. I was scared bringing it home. It was the first thing I hid under my*

*bed. The only thing I had ever hid under my bed, and I was worried that somebody was going find it. I was worried I'd get in trouble because it was so violent.*

### **An Introduction to Pikel**

Pikel, a pseudonym and a literary reference to a beloved character, spoke with me during his lunch break in his office during the week. He works as an academic advisor, and our time is spent when he does not have students in his office. Pikel has a master's degree. He leaned his full frame back in his chair, often rocking himself as he thought about his responses. He accentuates his thoughts with the movements of his hands as if he is conducting a silent orchestra. In our first meeting, his nondescript office is in the background; the only suggestion to his personality is his artwork on the wall behind him, which he shows me during our conversation. During our second meeting, the background image has changed and is now a hangar from a Star Wars movie. We connected about Star Wars in our first conversation, so it seems fitting. This change fits him more naturally, and I can imagine him carefully determining what background image to use and for what purposes. He admitted that he loves using *nerdy* backgrounds in his online meetings.

Pikel stated that he did not have any preferences for genres. Still, as we continued our conversations, it became evident that he did have a preference that dated back to his childhood. Pikel is drawn to mysteries, but not always in the most immediate evoking of the term. He is drawn to realistic worlds but with a hint of unreality. This seems to connect to his desire to escape from the *monotony* of his days. He enjoys science fiction and fantasy books. Pikel evoked an almost Goldilocks sense in that it must be “just

right.” There must remain an element of realism, and his sense of imagination and wonder must be aroused. He shared he does not like Tolkien because he gets lost in his world descriptions. Instead, Pikel wants some information, and his imagination can take the lead. Pikel prefers print for *physicality* and audiobooks for ease.

Pikel is in his early 40s and identifies as European American. He was formally identified as gifted in elementary school. Though he talks about an early education abroad with little challenge, his challenge was isolation and loneliness from the constant moving. He went to kindergarten – second grade in California, third grade in Kansas, fourth grade – part of sixth grade in Belgium, and the latter half of sixth through eighth grade spent in Germany. Finally, his family settled in Colorado, where he attended high school. His book choices show that he longed for companionship and ways to address his needs. Pikel profoundly loves animals, often selecting novels where animals are prevalent in the plot. He is a father to two children, who are both gifted. His whole family reads, and he talks about *team reading* with his wife and their children. *We always joke around that books are toys in our house. They always have been.*

### **Gifted Reading**

Pikel admitted that initially, he did not feel that he read enough or had enough similarities with books. Still, through our conversations, he realized he has commonalities with the books he selects to read: *I read more books than I realized.* He acknowledged there are more similarities in the choices of books that he reads than he anticipated. However, a common theme in our conversations was using books to *escape*, which will be illustrated in the sections below. How he remembers details about books and their

cover art is unlike any other participant. Pikel would recall the character's name and plot points, describe the characters based on his imagination, or detail the cover art. If a cover art is *too plain or too ornate*, he will ignore the book unless he knows the author or the series—only then will he *overlook it*. Pikel acknowledged that his reading had declined in the early years of parenthood, but audiobooks allowed him to read while commuting.

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

Pikel talked about books as if they were companions to his life story. Pikel has continually been drawn to animals in books, and those are often the characters with whom he shares the most empathy. When I first asked him about his favorite books, he shared Jurassic Park, Congo, The Martian, The Relic, Airframe, the X-Men comics, and The Hardy Boys series. Pikel is drawn to the preternatural and yet logical premises of these books. The overwhelming theme of many of these books is the idea that we can be something more than we are—a transformation—wherein the world changes from the beginning to the end of the book. Pikel is drawn to some level of rebellion in his book selection.

Pikel talked about his passion for science fiction and fantasy books. Only through our conversations did he realize that he likes mysteries, too, as many of his books have an undercurrent of the unknown. He divulged: *It's either going to be Dungeons & Dragons type of fantasy or sci fi. The modern stuff is more biological. The science fiction is the true science rather than the futuristic fiction. But it's definitely fiction—some sort of*

*science to it in some way. Even with high fantasy<sup>4</sup>, the ones with swords and dragons, in the medieval time frame. It's not historical knights riding into battles. It could happen. It's more they've got a sorcerer with them. There's the science fiction. There's the connection. All the magic. That kind of thing. So, there's always that element in everything I read.*

Pikel talked about how he only reads fiction and very rarely reads nonfiction, which he calls *textbooks*. However, he does engage with nonfiction in a non-traditional sense. As a child, he reflected on reading Boys Life Magazine, a Boy Scout monthly magazine with how-to sections and other elements. He shared using books to help teach him new skills: *I had dozens of how-to-draw cartoon characters, everything from Hanna-Barbera up through Marvel and Celtic knot workbooks*. He taught himself how to use American Sign Language through how-to books as a teenager. Anything that he wanted to know more about, he would teach himself. He still relies on this non-traditional nonfiction for his hobbies as an adult. He recalled: *Miniatures gaming, tabletop things—they all have rulebooks, and there's a lot of different stories on the different armies and different characters. I like reading those. There's also painting guides and how to do the different techniques or paint the different armies—what different colors mean.*

However, he recognized that it is not so much about the genre as it is about the writing. Pikel asserted, *Different types of styles and certain things, I try to read. Even if*

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<sup>4</sup> High or epic fantasy is defined by taking place outside of our world, Earth, and has it's own rules and physical laws (MasterClass, 2021).

*it's a subject matter I'm into, the author can really lose me at the same time. So, if there's a style I'd like, I kind of go back to that as much as anything else. It's the author, the story, and the writing. Most importantly, his books have commonalities. I posed this to him as a hyper-realism with a twist, which he immediately attached: *Tweak is a good way to put it. It's all about...the not real. What could happen? Where it could go? Changing...It's that escape from what actually is and something that could be.**

As a child, Pikel was a fan of The Hardy Boys, reading almost every book in the series and R.L Stein and Goosebumps series. He recollected enjoying solving things, which is evident in his childhood book selections. As a child of a military parent, books let him be in control and find a tidy ending, which childhood life seemed to lack. He reflected on reading Boys Life Magazine. Through the magazine, he had his first exposure to A Wrinkle in Time and comic books, which would later become vital to him. His childhood books felt more orderly in their endings, even if they were not as cognitively challenging. Pikel reflected: *It's all about the rising action. In the last chapter, it seems that everything fell out. I wasn't quite Sherlock Holmes, but it was a lot more approachable at that point. But for me, it's just doing something different. You're going into a different world. It can be stressful, somebody else's stress. It's the same idea as The Hardy Boys—you know there's going to be a problem, but you know, it's going to get solved.* Pikel searched for meticulous conclusions across his lifespan.

Pikel used reading as a form of *escape* and *disconnection*, with the refrain of *escape* consistently appearing in many of his responses. Pikel talked about using audiobooks as part of his daily drive to and from work as a form of reading. Pikel

divulged, *I like to use audiobooks on my way home. It's a way to disconnect and do something completely different. That's the main way I read; otherwise, it is just kind of at home whenever.* Pikel spoke about the *monotony* of his job and that the engagement with audiobooks before or after his day assisted him with reframing and refocusing. Since our initial interviews, Pikel has changed to a new campus and now participates in Common Reads on campus. He said one of the first books he read was No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America, which profoundly impacted him since it is nonfiction and autobiographical. No Ashes in the Fire set the tone for a campus with a different tone and clientele, creating an emotional reaction for him as he processed the author's hardships. Pikel talked about the book as if it was transformational for him—helping him better understand a whole new level of people's experiences.

Generally, Pikel rarely rereads books. He shared that only Jurassic Park and Condor were read twice, and those were because of his connection between the books and the movies. He disclosed: *I'm not one to go back and explore that way. I like to try new things.* He continually referred to the impact of film adaptations of books. Congo's film adaptation was the first which caused him to reevaluate the order in which a book is read. Pikel shared: *Michael Crichton's Congo...It's kind of the one that started that for me. I loved, loved, loved that book. I went and saw the movie and was completely destroyed by it because they just totally mutilated the story itself. So now it's one of those things to where if I'm going to do that, I reverse it. For movies, I'll go in. I'll watch it, then go to the book because then the books supports itself rather than being disloyal to the source material. Which is weird for the direction, but it kind of works that way.*

Pikel talks about his passion for animals and that it has always been a part of his life. He reflected that no one could remember the beginnings of his infatuation with animals but that he has always felt connected to them. So, it is no wonder that he has been drawn to books with animals over his lifetime as a reader. Most of the books we discussed have an animal that plays a crucial part in the story's plot. Pikel admitted: *All those books, especially if there were animals, would be the reason I would read. That's got me into the Jurassic Park books. Congo was really big because it was all about sign language, gorillas, and going back home. To me, being an animal guy, that was just so cool, and that was kind of what drew me to those books. That's why they were so impactful to me. That was a book about animals that could interact with humans.*

Pikel frequently immersed himself in the entire book and world, enjoying the worlds he entered. This is evident in his book choices, which all have richly developed worlds with enough detail to be engaging, but not too much that he feels he cannot escape inside. He also has joined a Star Wars Legion, which is a costume club. This has impacted his reading selections: *We read what we want when we want. Lately, it's been either just for fun in the car with the audiobooks or kind of connecting to something that I'm interested in, be it my hobbies or my clubs or whatnot. Right now, Star Wars is the big one, and those new books are coming out; figuring out what you're getting into.*

As a discerning reader, Pikel spoke about selecting books for himself. He has allowed himself to be *picky*, and the why and what behind his book selection is just as important as the book itself. He discussed the difference between a good book and a fun book: *The good books will make you do more research, but the fun books just get you to*



*go along for the ride.* In our conversations, he talked about researching when he was intellectually curious about the topic. Otherwise, he would just read past it. He gave explicit examples of looking up Weir's process and expertise when reading The Martian to better understand Weir's knowledge base.

Pikel typically only reads one book at a time. However, he does abandon books when he does not feel they are the right fit for him. He also inadvertently puts books down and does not pick them up again for a period of time because of circumstances in life. Pikel recollected: *I'll read a book to where something makes me put it down, either in life or in the story, and I'll step away, and I pick something else up. It's like, 'Oh yeah, I forgot about that one.' Then, I'll pick it up to finish it.*

### ***Reading Environments***

Pikel's reading environment has changed over time based on his age and where he was living. His selected location could be connected to his sensual OE, evident in his descriptions of himself and his light sensitivity. Pikel's reading location choice in childhood represents another form of escape, physically and mentally showing the power of his complete immersion in literature and rebellion. He recalled: *My first response is when I was waiting for the bully to leave, so I read in the library after school. I would read in my room. A lot of times, I don't know why at this point, but I would read my comic books, especially I read in my closet. I know it's weird. There's nothing tied to it like I was in trouble, but that's how I got away from it. Except for once, it probably started when we were moving locations. So, it's just a way to literally get away from my empty bedroom. Close the door. The darkness brought him a sense of comfort.*

As a college student, Pikel spoke about hanging out at Barnes & Noble and reading books there. It was a kind of a hangout for him; as an adult, he still picked out books. When there, he selected books from his favorite genres and continued to pick books based on their cover art and short synopsis. Pikel reads at home: *I probably read the most in the living room, because this is what we're doing when hanging out and playing with books is usually in the living room. Also, the basement, but caveat that with when I was reading the Ahsoka book, I was downstairs. That was my office—a table in our basement—during the pandemic and where I worked remotely. The best time to read is at night, but my wife and I are on slightly different schedules—she goes to bed earlier than I do, so I'll read in the living room.*

### **Pikel's Meaningful Book**

Pikel does very little repeat reading, as mentioned earlier. However, when asked what his most meaningful novel is, he selected a sentimental novel for two reasons: he likes the plot and storyline, though he later admitted the conclusion to the series was disappointing, and because he read it after his son was born. Poltergeist is the second in the Greywalker series but the first novel he read. Pikel says he picked up the novel at Barnes & Noble with his wife before his son was born. He was interested in the cover art and description but did not realize at the time he had picked up the second book in the

series. He said it gave him a different appreciation for the book and the series, reading the first two books out of order.<sup>5</sup>

Poltergeist is a book about the supernatural, but not in the traditional scare-you-witless sense. Instead, it focuses on a P.I. Harper Blaine, who dies for two minutes and can now see and walk in the grey, where ghosts, witches, vampires, and magic reside between our world and the next. The second novel takes place with Harper firmly rooted in the grey and working with vampires to get a soul trapped in an organ before Seattle collapses. The book is quirky, intelligent, and full of intrigue. It seems like a perfect fit for Pikel, and reading it, I can see why the book has resonated with him since he first read it over a decade ago. It combines his desire for fiction and escapism. Realism has a fundamental connection, but with a slight twist that makes the unbelievable believable. Richardson embeds maps of the city of Seattle and tracks the locales of her main character, creating another immersive element for Pikel, who thrives on those details. Finally, there is an element of nerd culture built into the series. They often talk about Dungeons & Dragons and other popular culture, providing an opportunity for Pikel to connect to the book personally.

Poltergeist has a sentimental meaning tied up in the book's meaning for Pikel. He first read the novel in the hospital following the birth of his first child: *It's really what's*

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<sup>5</sup> I have to agree with this sentiment. I read Poltergeist as part of this research, but continued on to read the series. I could forgive the main character for being so frustrating in the first novel, knowing how far she would be engrossed in the world of the grey by the second installment.

*...tied to the connection of reading it. Being in that little alcove in the window. It's a small, narrow, you know, the dad bench if you will. Reading the book while they're sleeping, that kind of thing. Being in the room. When it was quiet, that's when I read the book. And then really getting the story after that. It wasn't the story that connected to the birth, but it was the birth that connected to the story. So, there's always something parallel for me when I read.*

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

Pikel connected with three characters in the Greywalker series, each on different levels. His most substantial connection was to the main character: *Harper is the one that's really connected. That outside looking in [feeling]. It's really the disconnect. Yeah, she's part of the world. She's the extreme because she's in both worlds, our world and the grey world. The Greywalker world.* Extreme would be a good word to describe the character of Harper, who so thoroughly engrosses herself in the middle world that she was willing to let herself die to protect others. And though Harper has a boyfriend in the series, she often was isolated and lonely. The refrain of being lonely was present in my conversations with Pikel and feeling like an *outsider*.

The second character with whom Pikel identified is Quinton, Harper's love interest and the all-around fix-it guy of the series. He comes up with logical connections and applications to assist with merging the grey world into our world. Quinton is a rogue and another *outsider*, but just an extreme version. He shared: *Quinton, he can make the alarm out of a talking card, that kind of stuff. I identify with him, too, just because he has*

*that higher level thinking but totally disconnected with society. He's your typical conspiracy theorist, effectively avoiding the government and staying off the grid, even that kind of stuff. So he's the one that's a little bit more on the extreme edge.* Pikel continually brushed off his intelligence, just as Quinton does in the books.

Finally, Pikel's favorite character in the books is Harper's little ferret, Chaos. Pikel recollected: *I always have total connections between me and the animals. Chaos is probably my favorite character in the whole series—a little ferret.* As already established, Pikel has a soft spot for animals in books, and Chaos plays a pivotal role. Chaos can see the grey like her owner, and she frequently saves the day. Pikel's love for animals and Harper's devotion to her brave little ferret likely serve as another form of identification and connection to Harper. He could see how he would protect his animals if presented with a paranormal situation.

Beyond Poltergeist, Pikel identified with characters of his beloved childhood series: The Hardy Boys. He recognized: *I don't know what it was that kind of drove me. I guess it was you always want to be somebody growing up. For a while, it was The Hardy Boys.* These stories presented with two brothers, Frank and Joe Hardy, often sleuthing and solving crimes adults cannot resonate with a boy who felt isolated and lonely, always moving and having to make new friends every few years. The versions read by Pikel featured violence, murder, and international espionage. Pikel especially connected when the books took place abroad, where he lived, which provided him with another connection. Pikel enthused: *Actually, the one I have in my basement somewhere is about*

*them being at the German Hockenheimring, which is a racetrack, which is where I was growing up.*

The Hardy Boys created a connection to his nomadic lifestyle due to his father's service in the military. The constant burden in his young life of traveling in different countries but being another *outsider* seem to have weighed him down. Pikel found The Hardy Boys served as an opportunity to escape and travel with the brothers, with informative and orderly endings. Pikel considered: *That might explain my draw mysteries. You're always going somewhere else, seeing something new, and that was the lifestyle. The Hardy Boys always go somewhere and have something happen.* Pikel felt a kindredness with characters who are traveling.

### ***Catharsis***

Pikel spoke briefly about emotionality and memories connected with his remembrances of books. Then, returning to his meaningful read and the Greywalker series, Pikel reflected on the end of the series and spoke about Richardson, the author, as if he had a connection to her: *There's a couple of times in different media where I get really upset when something ends, and this one was it for me. The last book, I was so frustrated with the way it ended, so frustrated with the way that that she had to end it. But you could tell...it's just the last book in the series. Once you get to know her, it just feels like a strange ending.*

Pikel connected to books in different emotional forms, though never with emotional outbursts. Catharsis allows for following a character through complex tasks. Almost all of the books we discussed were fraught with turmoil for the main characters.

When asked if he had reacted emotionally to a book, he could not readily acknowledge an example. Instead, his response evoked a connection to his main reason for reading—escape. Pikel revealed: *That's the stuff that I escape from with books. It's almost a way to not have emotions and just flow with the story, kind of like go with the narrative.* Pikel seemed to mask an emotional connection to books because that is what he tries to avoid in the real world. Pikel shared that he is limited in what he can watch and read because of his life circumstances. Pikel admitted: *Some of what I can read has changed depending on what the scenario and the setup are. Certain movies or certain books, I can't read, being a husband or being a Dad. They're just some things I just can't do; I've got to put it away, so I think that's why I moved away from whodunnit murder mysteries.*

### ***Insight***

Pikel shared that in middle school, he read *The Baby-Sitter's Club* book. He had a friend named Amanda, and he thought reading a book with a main character named Amanda would be funny. Pikel never admitted this then and even related that he would not read the Nancy Drew mysteries because they were *girl books*, so *The Baby-Sitter's Club* book formed a sort of contradictory experience for him. However, in this particular *Baby-Sitter's Club* book, his friend's secret was revealed: she had diabetes. He admitted: *It was that introduction to 'holy crap.' You know, some of these people just go through stuff. You don't see it. And it's that connection that was one of the moments of maturity I can remember. 'This really is real. This really is impactful. This is why she's hiding it.'* This insight allowed him to be more empathetic towards others and the issues they might be hiding.

Pikel also connected COVID-19 and the Star Wars series. First, he spoke about the monotony of the days, which seemed like a connection to a lack of engagement due to the virus. He used literature as another form of escape, allowing himself to think of a time and place where he could travel again and not fear an outbreak. Pikel longingly commented: *Star Wars is the big one; they've got two ways to heal everything.* He quickly remarked that he does not just refer to the saga because it is currently popular. Pikel admitted: *I don't like it just because it's on trend; it's always kind of been there. It's one of those background things.* It seems as if Pikel wants to emphasize that he has been an enduring fan, not one who comes and goes from popular culture.

Pikel spoke about a connection to the characters of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and how that impacted his life. One of the graphic novels was the only thing he felt compelled to hide under his bed in his own form of rebellion. He admitted: *Characters I felt I needed to emulate or 'take on'...that would be 'Leonardo' from the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. I read the graphic novels—I even had one hidden under my bed—and my brother was really into the show. Since everyone made the connection between 'Leonardo' and my name, I felt like he had to be my favorite. I had to be like him...secretly though, Michelangelo was always my favorite—and potentially why Pizza is my favorite food.*

### ***Universalization***

Pikel talked about a connection to the X-Men character Wolverine multiple times, applying Wolverine to his own life. Wolverine is often rebellious, travels, and is full of anger, something Pikel divulged that he has struggled with his whole life. He reflected:



*After some thought, I think it was 'Wolverine' from the X-Men comics, sure...he's short and Canadian, and I'm not, but he has a severe anger issue...something I've always fought with. But, it was never an issue for him. He had the confidence to own it and his actions and was still liked by his group of friends. Something that was an important thought to me when I was moving around. His story also really drew from his time in Feudal Japan. He was trained as a samurai and learned how to hone it. I remember one issue of his comic where he was sword training with his sensei...every time he failed to strike his sensei with a bamboo sword, the sensei would slap him...it was close quarters, so Wolverine never landed a blow, but kept getting slapped, and eventually abandoned the sword and fight and fought with his hands and won. The lesson taught was that he won the fight against his sensei, but lost the fight against himself since he let his emotions take over, and therefore, the win was not 'his.' These themes were always popping up in his stories. That, combined with the fact that Wolverine traveled so much, really resonated with me.*

Pikel also spoke about his connection to self-understanding that he could apply to his life and the lives of others. Taming the Tiger Within was a book that forced Pikel to reflect on himself, his life, and his anger. He clarified: *It talks about the fundamentals of the middle way. It's kind of a gratifying thing. That's why Buddhism is so attractive to me because it's the middle way, which is centering yourself in Western terminology. Still, it's all about the middle because sometimes you do overreact, you do things way too hard, way too much, or you don't do enough, or you withdraw or that kind of thing. But in the middle, you kind of come back to your even keel and practice on how to do that and why*

*that's beneficial to yourself and the outside. And it's a couple of strategies to do that and how the aggression can be harmful long term. Pikel also connected Taming the Tiger Within to Wolverine's experiences with the samurai and how he used that to tame his anger. So, it is clear that Pikel used the world of literature and applied it to his life and the universal theme of anger.*

### **Reading to Address Affective Needs**

Pikel described himself as having anxiety, sensual OE, imaginal OE, and being an anti-perfectionist. He spoke about how the book's structure can create or release his anxiety, explicitly concerning the book's resolution. He also connected the difference between reading, listening, and watching: *Some books build up the drama that drops off. So, in three or four chapters, its major conflicts are over quick. And the resolution part is lost, but it's easier to read because, in three or four chapters, you're done. Move on. The ones that build, I find myself reading deeper and reading longer just because of that. It's like that anxiety becomes excitement—it's a way to keep the duality, but for me, movies are a big thing. It's easier for me to read about some of those things than to watch it. The medium does change. The audiobook is the same way.*

He confessed that he sometimes looks at the end of the book because he cannot handle the anxiety of not knowing since he is so invested in the plot and the characters. He admitted: *I think a lot of that comes from Congo and the movie. So, it's the kind of the same vein. If I'm really getting into this, I'm going to be really invested. I want to know where I could be disappointed. So, I don't want all the spoilers, but I want to know how it ends.*

Through conversations with Pikel, it seemed his relationship with his father had moments of strain. His father was an officer in the military, and Pikel needed to prove himself. His rebellion seemed to stem from some of these concerns. He spoke about feeling a need to be perfect. And any imperfection was a reflection of his father's failure. He quickly clarified that his father never stated that to him, that it was just his perception, but he was unsure if that was overt or covert pressure from his father. He unusually described his plight with perfectionism: *I'm more anti-perfectionist because I grew up with a very perfectionist father. I'm not a detail-oriented person, so I got in trouble a lot. I'm not a perfectionist, but I strive for perfection. So, it kind of plays into my anxiety as a shortcoming. I sometimes ask for certain things I see. I know it won't work, I can't do it, but I try for it. It's always been a lifelong thing, but I can't get to that lane of perfectionism. So, it's wanting to be perfect, trying for perfect, but knowing I can never get there.*

Pikel's military upbringing had an additional impact on him. Pikel made a connection around starting to read comic books in sixth grade as his way of coping with military life during a time of strife. He described his reading as maturing at that time with the addition of comic books. He added: *I thought they were very violent books, but it was everybody's fight, and everybody's always getting on that way, which is maybe how I translated my military upbringing. But at the same time, very few ever died. Even if they did, they came back. So, it had some aspects of normalizing just being an outcast and normalizing some of the violence going on. That was right around the same time as Desert Shield, the one with Saddam Hussein. My best friend, I remember his mom was a*

*combat nurse, so she was on the front lines. Through him, you'd hear about the stuff that isn't really a thing anymore. His family got redacted letters every six months and that kind of thing.*

Pikel also described negative feelings about characters and authors when they deviated from what he had mentally prepared for them. This seemed to be due to how engrossed he became in books and how he used literature to escape. When there is a departure from his expectation, he is incredulous. When asked to describe his emotions, he shared, *frustration and almost anger. Because that's not the character. I'm kind of dealing with, 'No, he's not going to do that.' Or, 'No, that character doesn't behave this way.'* He continued sharing that he sometimes enjoys spoilers because it lets him know what he is getting into. This prevents the emotional rollercoaster of the plot twists. This may connect to his anxiety and OEs. I asked him if knowing makes it more enjoyable, and he responded, *It removes judgment because if I go into something thinking a certain way, especially if I know a character well, and it's a new medium or a new story or that kind of thing, and they take it in completely a left-hand turn. My response is, 'That's not who that person is. That's not who my character is. That's not my Wolverine.'*

### ***Social Isolation***

A common theme in our conversations was the feeling of being an *outsider* and *alone*. As a child in the military, moving frequently made making friends difficult. Pikel talked about having friends, but they were not friends with whom he would discuss a book. Instead, books served as interim friends and intellectual stimulants. He recalled, *I think it's part of that outsider kind of thing. I was always moving around. I got to the*

*point to where I didn't make a lot of friends, and there were jokes about having to drag people over to our house to make friends for me. And we were friends, but we were more about being outside and playing in the forest or playing Army men like our parents were and that kind of thing. So, literature was my thing, not our thing at point. This idea of isolating pieces of himself from others could relate to the struggle gifted boys often have of feeling like they do not fit in.*

It is interesting to note that many of his favorite books have a main character who is an outcast for some reason, though they still, in many cases, retain a tight-knit group of friends. It seemed that Pikel was also searching for this type of friendship. He admitted he still may be searching on some level: *I think that's why I really gravitated toward the X-Men comic books. They're all mutants. They're outcasts. They're weird, but they're all weird together compared to the rest of society. And I think that's kind of why I really got into those books. They were just very slick and hard, and that's what really got me. They kind of became the idea I was to try to emulate that art that was bigger. But the X-Men set it up that it was still okay to be yourself.*

To combat that isolation, Pikel spoke of reading books and connecting to friends and family, which provided unique opportunities for connections with others. He recalled, *In high school, my roommates who introduced me to Dungeons & Dragons had been reading the stories for quite a while, and I read the War of the Spider Queen series to be able to join in on the conversations they had, which introduced me to the Drizzt saga, as it was being reintroduced, so it gave us some more to think about. This connection to peer groups through his passions provided an opportunity to deepen their*

friendship. Pikel also spoke about using this same technique later in life: *About eight years ago, I read In the Blink of an Eye: Dale, Daytona, and the Day that Changed Everything, the Darrell Waltrip story about Dale Earnhardt's death in NASCAR. I used the book with my father-in-law to connect over something.*

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

Pikel spoke about not liking discussion about books and never using it for understanding. The caveat to this is his Star Wars Legion, where they all talk about the literature to create their costumes, cosplay better, and improve camaraderie surrounding the subject matter. He shared that occasionally in college, he would converse with his peers about Dungeons & Dragons campaigns, not to understand but to have a richer conversation. He shared: *It was more to understand the source material, so we would understand what we were playing. Understanding it was inherent to it.* When asked directly if there was anything that Pikel would feel compelled to discuss with others, his response was, *It's definitely something cool to share. It is always fun to bring up and talk about when it's something that's going on in real life.*

In parallel to the theme of isolation, it seemed that many of Pikel's books were only read by him. As a result, he had no one with whom to engage in discussion, even if he did want it. He recalled, *I honestly can't even remember a book where an adult read it around me. I'm sure somebody read Jurassic Park. My sixth-grade teacher never brought it up. I can't remember talking to anybody about it. I know at home, it was not what they were reading.* This reiterates the importance of parents reading the same books as their

children to engage in authentic discussions about the books, especially if they are more mature in content. In the same vein, Pikel discussed that he felt alone in his preferred reading topics. He divulged: *I think a lot of the people I'm around that I would be comfortable discussing books with aren't into the same theory as I am or the same topics as I am. So, it's always been my own lane type of thing, I guess, adding to that idea of escape.*

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

Pikel reflected that very rarely does he do an active stop when reading. Instead, it will be a little pause to consider, *Can that really happen?* Pikel is inquisitive and wants to learn more about his interests. Pikel described sometimes researching topics of interest to him either in the book or about the author of books. Pikel needs to find something compelling in his books to keep him engaged. He talked about his engagement with one of his favorite books, Jurassic Park. He recalled, *The genetics and thinking of Jurassic Park...that one specifically was all about the science. I connected to the material more than necessarily a character or experiences. It was all about the genetic coding. In the movie, where they're talking about how some females can become males, it's also explained in the book how that actually genetically happens. What sequence comes out? All that kind of thing. That just was the coolest thing to me. I think that's also why some of those books that, maturity-wise, I think were a little above me growing up, but, reading level, were just fine. I think it was the science thing that I could actually latch on to that made it less scary or allowed me to disconnect from some of the peril.*

In his current book, To Sleep in a Sea of Stars, Pikel talked about researching more about the characters and the future plot. On Paolini's website, he found more than he bargained for, admitting, *I kind of cheated. I didn't realize Paolini was such an immersive art author, and he already has a website up with everything from the characters to the phone cases and that kind of thing. I did some snooping. I got some spoilers. Oh, but he's got character design, which is really cool. It's kind of cool to be able to see where he's trying to go.* Given what I know about Pikel, this did not hinder his understanding of the book and may have simultaneously made it more enjoyable and frustrating. He later commented that Paolini's character art for the main character was off base from what he had envisioned in his imagination and where he thought the character's arc was headed.

Pikel described another reason for choosing to only think about books by himself: he does not want to engage in an argument. He feels so strongly about the characters and the stories that it almost feels abhorrent to engage in a discussion where someone might disagree. He clarified, *I can get to the point of frustration or argument. So if you have something different, I can get so invested that I want to say, 'No, you're wrong.' That's just not enjoyable anymore. It takes the fun out of it. So it's easier for me to internalize.* He also internalized through his visual memories of the book. He described in vivid detail a panel from X-Men where Wolverine is forced to question his anger by his sensei. He reminisced, *I can see that panel in the comic book. It's like, 'Yes, you did win. But who won? The human or the animal?' When I'm losing my temper, that's something I can always think of.*



When it comes to annotations, Pikel rarely notates his books. He confessed that he frequently dog-ears pages that he thinks are essential. He sometimes does mark the margins of source material, but only rarely. He explained, *If I do annotate, it might be in the ledger, that kind of thing. That's more me kind of processing or redefining it, or if I have no clue what they're saying. In some of the really high fantasy books, I kind of write it down that way. I make my own footnotes is really what it's about.* He stated that he dog ears and references things if they are pivotal to his cosplay when he reads literature in that universe.

### **Brief Analysis of Pikel**

Pikel used reading as a form of rebellion, from his book selections to how he interacted with others about books. Pikel preferred audiobooks for the ease of multitasking, though he still chose paper books for media he thinks he will need to reference. Pikel's discernment regarding the cover art for a novel can impede or compel choices. Pikel appeared both self-aware and commonly misperceived; his novel choices reflect that dichotomous element of his psyche. Pikel frequently spoke about a struggle with anger and frustration, likening it to X-Men's Wolverine. Wolverine's internal struggle with himself, anger, and nomadic life created a sense of application for Pikel. Pikel spoke about feeling isolated, even when he had friends, which often made him feel out of place and that he needed to dull his abilities for others. Pikel used novels to engage his intellectual needs, though he rarely discusses novels. Instead, Pikel uses metacognition to better understand the novels he reads and the parallels he can make to his life.

## Chapter Six: Portraits of Gifted Readers in Their 50s

### Marie

*For me, Vonnegut was all middle fingers wrapped up in the acceptable label of literature. He had such a dry poignant delivery that I was like, 'Huh? Oh yeah, you're my guy.' He was totally sardonic, dry. To me, it was just brutal and beautiful. I think his work gave me permission to have the feelings I had. His style spoke to me, and it broke all the rules—a one-word sentence. 'I was like, You're awesome. You're my guy.'*

### An Introduction to Marie

Marie met with me on the weekends, with her hair chaotically flowing around her head. It was immediately apparent she was enthusiastic and had the energy of someone you want to befriend. Marie described herself as a *female educator from a long line of educators*; she shares her tagline: *artist/educator/creative and restless soul*. Marie, who identifies as Mestiza/Latinx and is in her 50s, grew up in rural southwestern Colorado. She split her time between her family ranch and a school across the border in New Mexico, where her mother taught. Marie's walls behind her are primarily white, but her artwork is sprinkled behind her—images that evoke emotion and are full of color. She shared that she put up most of it as her background when teaching online during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is a fitting background for Marie—blending her art and Kokopelli (i.e., an Indigenous American fertility god, symbolizing growth and joy).

Marie shared that she did not know what gifted meant until her son was identified. At that time, she read a few books, which resulted in her realizing that she was gifted, too, though she immediately remarked, *there's a little ego thing where you think, 'Oh, you can't really say that.'* Marie spoke openly about many gifted characteristics, including anxiety, perfectionism, OEs, asynchrony, and feeling isolated. She shared, *I totally felt misunderstood—all the time. I was an only child. I was GT, but unidentified. So, I was just the spazzy kid. I had a lot of biblio references that nobody did. I mostly talked to adults. So, I had a vocabulary that was different than my peers. I always felt on the outside...always.*

Marie preferred reading fiction, though she read a large number of nonfiction books. She uses nonfiction books as references for projects for artwork and her student's lessons. Marie has a delicate balance between rereading beloved books, or books she never finishes and continually restarts, and reading something she has never before read. In adulthood, she has gravitated toward didactic literature, focusing specifically on self-development and self-understanding through books. Marie liked learning about herself and others when she read. In our second interview, she talked about finishing Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle and how that had impacted her understanding of herself and others—especially teachers in the post-COVID-19 era. However, when I asked her about her preference, she quickly responded that it was *absolutely fiction*. As an adult, she relied on audiobooks and podcasts as her primary form of reading to multitask. However, in April 2023, Marie reflected that although she has preferred

audiobooks and podcasts in the past, *it is one thing to listen and another to have your eyeballs take in print.*

### **Gifted Reading**

Marie remembered being an early reader and always having books with her in school. She shared that books helped get her through school. She favored books with some level of controversy or where the authors were unapologetic. She reflected in her early teens reading The Flowers in the Attic, the remainder of the series, and getting *lost* in it. Marie recalled, *I remember going through a whole horror thing, with Stephen King. Flowers in the Attic probably got me started...that was like the gateway drug. Then you graduate to Stephen King, and it's really horrific, horrific things.* I asked her if she thought she selected books consciously or was meeting a subconscious need, and she responded: *I think I was choosing things very specifically for a reason, but the subconscious part later was like, 'Why am I still here?' When you finally reach a point with it where you're like, 'Yeah, I'm done. I don't need to be in this anymore.' That's where I got with Stephen King. I would say that now because I'm definitely not going back to that genre of books. It had its time. It was interesting.* However, this is not true with all of her adolescent reading. She related, *Vonnegut was huge for me—he got me through high school.* Since then, Marie has continued to read Vonnegut books, though she admitted there are a few she has started but never finished. Marie spoke about reading a lot of fiction, which declined when she was in college. After she had a child, she transitioned to more children's literature. She confessed that fiction could still capture her attention. *Ten years ago, with The Hunger Games, I totally got engrossed in those books,*

*like all-nighters. I remember it was summer when my neighbor lent them to me, and I just stayed up. I couldn't wait for the next one to finish. That story...I just totally got lost in that whole series.*

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

Marie read various books as a child, and most served as an opportunity for escape for her. She recalled as a child getting a monthly “Little Golden Book” and treasuring it. She spoke fondly of reading Judy Blume books despite them being banned.

*Mischievously, she divulged, I did gravitate towards Judy Blume, first of all, because I loved it. And, of course, the second part was it was banned from the library. It was taken off the shelf and put in a back room, but I got it. So that made me love it even more.*

Marie divulged that books were never off limits for her, so she frequently read things that others did not. In fact, she had special permission from her mother to read Judy Blume, despite them banning it. She also shared that she read and enjoyed, Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret. This was another banned book. When I asked her about banned books, she shared, *In rural New Mexico, in the 70s, the perspective was, 'You don't talk about that young lady.'* *But I've had access to what's been considered banned books forever, especially art books. I grew up on Hieronymus Bosch from a very young age. Stuff that...I don't even know if any child should be exposed to.*

Marie sought authentic lived experiences in the books that she read. She named several of her favorite authors, Kurt Vonnegut, Isabel Allende, Rudolfo Anaya, and Don Miguel Ruiz. Many of these authors she read in high school and the years following.

Marie tended to gravitate toward authors, consuming as many of their books as speak to

her. In this phase of her life, she talked about having a list of books she wants to read, but does not have the time right now. Marie shared, *There's a lot I would like to read in some fantasy life. But...I can't imagine it. I really, really want to go back and revisit some Tony Hillerman stuff, Rudolfo Anaya stuff, and Sherman Alexie. There's some new Indigenous authors that I would love to read. Yeah, that's like a fantasy. I don't know when...maybe when I retire. I don't know when these books are going to get read.* In August 2022, Marie reduced her role at work, moving to a part-time position. This has allowed her an opportunity to read some of the books she has put on hold or only read pieces of over the last several years. She has found a way to make time. She enthused, *it's allowed me to get my eyes on books.*

She gravitated toward books about mysticism and the inner workings of the world. She shared that she enjoyed reading science fiction and liked The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy series and some backstories for the Star Wars series, but she felt they were *too rich in detail*. I inquired if this created a sensory overload for her, and she said, *Yes, I lose the story in Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, or other books where it's so much. I have too much life going on...I can't go to your world.* When she spoke about her nonfiction passion, she talked about novels with authentic voices. She shared that she had recently read The Body Is Not an Apology, Second Edition: The Power of Radical Self-Love and that she loves Brené Brown's books.

Regarding the evolution of her reading habits, Marie read to escape as a child because she felt books were *one size fits all, and there was always a place for me in a book*. Marie spoke about how her reading as a child was *reinforced*, the concept of *being*

*smart* correlated with her reading. Marie considered, *And those things are kind of changing. I used to read to escape. Now, I think I read for direction and reference. I do other weird things to escape. I can't remember reading for escape. Although a friend was telling me about a book, and I was like, 'Oh, you have to give that to me. That sounds like the best book.'* I haven't read truly a story for the sake of enjoying a story in I don't know how long. However, Marie does not read historical books, as she does not derive any pleasure from reading *straight-up history*, though she will read historical fiction.

### ***Reading Environments***

As an adult, Marie prefers digital and audiobooks, though, in the fall of 2022 – spring of 2023, she has returned to physical copies, though only a few. She contemplated: *Now that I'm older, almost everything is digital. I'm still surrounded by books. I love books. I promote books. Everything books. But now, almost all my content is digital. It's pretty rare for me to digest actual paper anymore. But when I do, I love it.* She later spoke about why she had gravitated toward audiobooks. *I like a physical book, but I don't know if this is just a story I'm telling myself or if there's something really cognitively there...it probably could just be stress, but I seem to have a harder time tracking, retaining, and maintaining interest. I have friends who really derive great pleasure from continuing to sit with a book. And I remember a time when I used to. But if I sit down, I fall asleep. Audiobooks seem like the best way for me to get information because I still want to feed my brain. I still want stories. I still want all of those things. The easiest way is to multitask with stories.* Like many other participants, Marie relied on audiobooks in

adulthood. She shared that she listens to books in bed, in the shower, and sometimes in the car when she waits and travels.

### **Marie's Meaningful Book**

Marie divulged she thinks of books *like a compass to help you get where you want to go, where you'd like to go, or where you can help others go*. This idea is prevalent in her two meaningful books: [A Little Prince](#) and [The Alchemist](#). [A Little Prince](#) was her most meaningful book until she read [The Alchemist](#) for the first time in college. Since that initial read, she returns to the book each year. She also keeps copies of [The Alchemist](#) to hand them out to people. Both books speak to mysticism and a greater understanding of the purpose of each person. In [The Alchemist](#), the main character, Santiago, has a reoccurring dream about seeking treasure at the pyramids, so he embarks on a journey. On his way there, he meets a myriad of successes and failures—he meets mentors, falls in love, and learns the importance of who he is and how to improve himself. According to Marie, *The Alchemist is my go-to for everything. It's about how the universe always has your back and to follow your heart. To be aware of distractions. It's a very sweet little fable*. Interestingly, this may be the only book she has not enjoyed in audio form. After our first interview, I read this novel, and in our second interview, I told her I had listened to the audiobook narrated by Jeremy Irons. She said she had never even considered listening to the audiobook, but she would try it because she loves the story and Jeremy Irons. Then, in April 2023, she recognized, *I kind of don't want to listen. Every time I read the book, and I don't know how many times I've read it at this point, it's still a new read for me. It's such a special experience for me. I am protective of this*



*story. I don't want to chance it changing.* The idea of protecting meaningful books is shared amongst all participants, each holding books in a distinctive place.

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

Marie shared identifying with Judy Blume when she was younger. She reiterated, *I remember in grade school being a huge fan of Judy Blume and just really escaping in that because it felt like, 'Gosh, somebody gets it.'* When I asked her to elaborate on any connections she could make with her own life, she asserted, *Probably I found some resources in it. Otherwise, I would have continued going back to her.* Another character she identified with, found helpful, and entertaining was the titular Margaret in Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret. Margaret, a gifted child, talked to adults and questioned her surroundings. Margaret discovered what it means to enter womanhood from an authentic perspective. As shared earlier, both books were banned and discussed real-world issues and occurrences for young girls. These books helped her immensely in grade school and helped her as she searched for genuineness in life.

Marie also shared identifying with a character in a book in her childhood. As mentioned earlier, she often felt misunderstood and alone. She related reading the story of Alexander and the Magic Mouse, and she loved the images in the book as much as the story itself. She recalled, *The alligator had to go into town one day, and he was smiling. And the townspeople ran fleeing, terrified of him, and they didn't realize he was so sad. He was crying, and he was in the rain; nobody could see his tears because he was in the rain. He was so misunderstood. He was trying to put on his best smile, but he was*

*showing his teeth.* She related the story of Alexander to her feeling of being misunderstood, another common theme among participants. Furthermore, Marie divulged, *I still feel I could live in that book.* She added she had recently read a story that paralleled Alexander's story and found the repetition of themes fascinating over decades.

### ***Catharsis***

Marie spoke about connecting with The Alchemist in awe in college—realizing the power of a simple story. She felt inspired by the idea that *there are universal forces that are out to help you. I read it at a time in my teens when I felt isolated, trying to figure out who I am and where I am in the world. I felt alone, but the book planted the seed that maybe I was really not alone. One of the lines in the novel is, 'The universe is always conspiring in your favor,' ...and I was just awestruck. The universe always has got your back, and that was really powerful.* Marie shared she has an *emotional response to practically everything I read. Otherwise, I don't think I would read it.* Marie often related to stories with animals. She remembered crying when reading Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH because *I realized humans aren't the only ones who can think. There is a horror in the way humans treat animals, sometimes, and I just cannot handle it.* Marie reminisced that when her mother, who was a librarian, read to her as a child, it was *theater...she made the books come alive.* In Alexander and the Magic Mouse, she recalled her mother acting out the fever that Alexander had, and she could vividly remember the *sound of my mother saying, 'Magic Mouse.'* Unfortunately, her mother passed away in April 2022 after our second interview. As she shared this story with me in

April 2023, Marie teared up, emphasizing the impression and significance of her mother reading to her as a child.

Marie shared another example of having an emotional reaction to a book. She recalled in elementary reading a book, though she did not remember the name of it. She scrutinized, *I had to have been in third or fourth grade and had been totally engulfed in a book. I just remember this one part of a story—this boy who I really identified with, but I don't know why. I remember the boy was very poor, and he was a little black boy—he was a person of color—and that struck a chord with me. Very few, if any, books that I read as a child had a main character as a person of color. The story took place in an inner city, but I remember that poverty was definitely a thing and that he sacrificed for the cat. I don't know if he stole some money or if he stole food, but it was to feed a cat. I just remember having an emotional response to that—how he sacrificed and risked to save the cat. I remember being in my bedroom and sobbing about this boy and the cat.*

Marie, who grew up on a farm, said she had a soft spot for animals, and many of the books she shared from her childhood and adolescence have animals as the main characters.

### ***Insight***

Frequently, Marie discussed thinking about books and engaging in insight or transferring of a character's personality or motivations to increase self-understanding and allow reflection on options. For example, Marie spoke about identifying and relating to the boy, Santiago, in The Alchemist. Santiago starts the book as a sheep herder but aspires for more. Santiago met Melchizedek, who claimed to be the King of Salem, and

told him he must pursue his Personal Legend, so Santiago sold his sheep and set off, but disaster ensued, and a thief stole all his money. He finds work with a local crystal merchant, who teaches him lessons, and Santiago suggests polishing the glass, which makes the glass more enticing and causes both men to become rich. Reflectively, she said, *Santiago was always searching. I'm always wondering and comparing myself to him. 'Where am I on my path? Is this the point where I'm enamored with the glass, as I could easily just polish glass all day.'* It was such a wonderful thing. And he had a good life. Or are you 'this close?' she says, pinching her fingers together. 'What do you need to do to be uncomfortable enough to just keep going?' Santiago eventually leaves the glass merchant and sets out on the phase of his adventure. Marie, too, seems to be wondering about the next part of her adventure, and it is through Santiago that she reflects on her recent decisions.

In the last few years, as she has turned to didactic literature, Marie has been able readily to transfer knowledge. I asked her to reflect on her use of insight as a child and adolescent, and she reminisced, *I think I absolutely did use it to think about what I thought I was. Like to reinforce that or to find solutions too. It was a lot of fiction, so I think it was probably a lot of escape.* She shared that she had moments of insight, *I'll hear a hook, and I'll be like, 'Oh, that's why they're doing what they're doing. Or that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. Or this is what I need to do'.* Marie divulged that the nonfiction she reads or the podcasts she listens to make her stop and think. She related this to her life and her choices.

### ***Universalization***

Marie shared an example of applying the knowledge from a book to her life. She spoke about her recent reading of Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle. The novel discussed the details of *a stress cycle and how the body manifests stress. If you don't complete a cycle. A lot of times, we reason it, and we put it aside like, 'Oh, that's okay, I'm done.' And we don't really complete it. I keep revisiting it.* When I asked her why she felt she needed to review the stress cycle, she reflected, *I have colleagues who've quit teaching, and even my friends who are in the book club were all burned out. It's just like one thing on top of another on top of another. It just never stops. And I can't save the world. I can't even save them. But in terms of just helping myself, I'm like... 'Well, no wonder. I just haven't completed a stress cycle.'*

### **Reading to Address Affective Needs**

Marie used books to address her social and emotional needs. She learned about her giftedness, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), and anxiety through books. She also shared that she is a perfectionist but questioned, *Who isn't? I mean, I guess there are people who aren't perfectionists.* Echoing earlier, Marie used books to escape. *I think [books] were just a huge escape. They were probably a big coping mechanism for escaping. That was big to get out of the emotional state and physical situations and into a book. And, of course, you don't think of it as therapy when you're a kid.* However, as an adult, she likens her reading over her lifespan to therapy. She shared turning to books after *incidents of trauma, and the books definitely helped me get through my trauma. You just go into your book, which offers a safe space.* She reiterated she had done a lot of

*realizing* as she has read so many developmental books over the last three years. She shared she had done *a lot of realizing that it was just my thoughts. Just because I was thinking it doesn't mean it was true. There was depression. There were addiction issues. There were a lot of coping mechanisms. And I cannot imagine not being literate. Literacy, I have no doubt, has absolutely changed my life...saved my life on so many occasions.*

Marie spoke about being purposeful in selecting books. She talked about an emotional OE reaction to a short story she read by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., where the main character made a contract with the devil, and she was *shocked so much I had to close it and put it down*. Her intellectual OE seemed satiated by her book choices and her need for more developmental books in adulthood. She considered, *I think I kind of go in cycles with it. Sometimes I very purposely lean toward dark humor. Sometimes, I go on the roadmap of manipulating moods. Sometimes I get things to make me cry on purpose. Sometimes I'll just start a 30-day journaling where [I want to] find stuff that makes me think*. She admitted it's a *habit of being all-in* to her books and that she *purposefully* decides what books to read and when. She occasionally does a *roulette* and picks something random, but she typically decides quickly that it is not the right book for her. She conceded, *I'm not interested in 90% of the stuff that's out there.*

In April 2023, Marie shared, *I spent time in a bookstore recently and came across Steal Like An Artist and bought it*. She enthused, *it was blowing my mind*. It is a book about books and creativity that spoke to her. Marie shared that she also has created a social media account about art books, which gives her *great joy*. She confessed she had

finally finished Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear, a book she had recommended to people for years yet never finished herself, ultimately allowing it to leave the bathroom drawer where it had so long inhabited. She found the time to finish only by reducing her time at work and her *reduced bandwidth*.

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

Marie shared that she only participated in discussions when she was in school, though she clarified it was only academically as a part of a class. She vividly recalled classroom discussions on Watership Down, Cannery Row, The Lord of the Flies, and 1984. However, she said it was more *about seeing perspective and analyzing the plot*. She does not remember *casually among peers discussing books*. She recalled that when she was in her early teens, several of her friends read The Flowers in the Attic series at the same time, and she might have discussed those books then, but that was the only time she readily remembered. In adulthood, she contemplated that sometimes her and a group of friends would do a book study together on a developmental book, though the most recent was during the pandemic.

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

Marie spends time thinking about her books in the moment and beyond. She considered, *I would say, this whole talking to people about books is fairly new, like two or three years. Before that, it was always just me and my head with a book and just having a conversation with myself. I don't know if it was growing up an only child or what, but I could live here in my head forever. I do live in my head*. She talked about

having conversations with herself and feeling natural. She divulged, *It was shocking to find out about a year ago that not everybody has that inner voice. I was like, 'What? How do you function without that?' And I learned how people cannot picture things. I can't imagine...and that's a thing some people really can't visualize their books.* She recognized that her vivid imagination and metacognition helped her better interact with books. Still, it can sometimes be detrimental, especially when a book is disappointing or emotional.

Marie spoke about *rewinding* her books when she needed to if she wanted to *hear that again*. She admitted she felt like she did not have the *luxury* to stop reading a book frequently. She tried to use every minute if she had a window of time for reading. However, she did talk about *digesting* a book in increments. She constantly reflects on the novel she reads. Occasionally, she will reread passages from her books. When I inquired what caused the reread, she shared, *probably because they hooked me once, and I want to review why they hooked me. What was there? And is it still there for me? Does it still hold some weight? Can I still use it?*

Marie annotated her books, clarifying she always uses a pen in her paper books. If she is listening to an audiobook, she added, *If there's a certain hook, I write it down, and I'll journal about it.* Marie explained that revisiting her annotations in Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear, Marie realized, *it validated my thinking and helped me realize that I processed more than I thought. But at the same time, I found things that I don't agree with. I question the author's authority, and I think in society today, we are much more comfortable questioning authority than we were when I was a child because I*



*would never have back then.* The final sentiments of this quotation connect back to her need for metacognition—she constantly returned to books and thought about them. Marie also described her rationale for annotation: *I think that if it's something that I find helpful in either managing my mind, directing my mind, or impacting the way I relate to others. I have two groups of friends. I have a group of long-distance friends that we dish about books and podcasts and stories. And then I have a group of local teachers that I do that with. It's like I'm always fishing for little bits, not just for myself, but to sort of bounce off them.*

### **Brief Analysis of Marie**

Marie read as a form of seeking authenticity in the world by using the wisdom she ascertains through novels. Marie gravitated toward authentic characters with real struggles that parallel the world, desiring something she could incorporate into her life. Marie was intentional in her book choices, making time in her busy life for the books that would have the most profound impact on her, depending on her rationale for reading. Over her lifespan, Marie has been a rebellious reader, finding joy in books that were banned. Marie reflected that her mother, a woman of color in the 1970s with an advanced degree in library sciences, helped shape her reading identity by refusing to reduce her options. Marie's reflective nature is evident in her metacognition and her book choices. Her meaningful novel, The Alchemist, has had a long-lasting effect causing her to reflect on the story's wisdom for over thirty years. Marie does not engage in discussion but heavily utilizes visualization for all-encompassing involvement in her reading.

## James

*I think that when there are characters in books or even in biographies or autobiographies who are sort of extraordinary people, it's like I admire whatever skill or gift they have, but yet, they also are normal people. It sort of normalizes that exceptional quality they have...makes it seem less inaccessible, more attainable. I'm curious about how people who have lived well, have lived those lives. Especially as they get older and realize that time is finite and [I'm] just trying to figure out if I'm on track to do everything I want to do with all the time I've got.*

### **An Introduction to James**

James met with me mainly in the evenings from his downstairs living room, where he was alone, though, occasionally, one of his three children would walk in off-camera to ask him a question. He reclined on the couch while sharing details about his life and his engagement with reading over his lifespan. James considered every word he shared, methodically revising his thoughts and engaging in metacognition. He admitted that he does not feel like he reads as much as he used to—the pressures of life have forced him to become a microconsumer of information, relying on mostly the news as his form of reading, though he does read the occasional book. The bulk of James' reading in adulthood is done on his MacBook, something he bought himself two years ago as his tablet aged out of usefulness. Unfortunately, though, he reflected, his laptop is not *very convenient*, nor does he like the *eye strain* it causes. However, as a child, he spoke about going to the library with his parents and an older sister, who were all avid readers, and spending several hours there at least once a week.

James is in his early 50s, identifies as Caucasian, and has been married for 29 years. He grew up in the Chicago suburbs and was formally identified as gifted in third grade. He shared, *I was super good at math. I got a perfect score on the math section of the ACT. I feel like we were really bored, and a few of us were probably a little disruptive because of that.* He was bussed to a different elementary school two days a week to attend classes in a modular behind the main building with other gifted students. James spoke of completing small projects, one in the morning and another in the afternoon. It was in this program he discovered his passion for computers. He reflected, *I just sat there and taught myself how to write my first program, and that really changed my life. [It] sparked an interest in computers and an unusual level of competence with computer programing, computer architecture, and the theory of computers.*

James is an engineer by trade and even has a patent for something he designed that people interact with daily without even knowing. James divulged, *What's interesting is that I was truly the sole inventor, but I chose to include four other coworkers on the patent, including a very antagonistic rival of mine at the time. I never really thought about it consciously until going through this process with you, but I have realized that my motivation for including these other coworkers who really contributed nothing to the idea was to avoid being the sole recipient of the accolades for the invention and to try to curry a better relationship with coworkers, especially my rival. I realize now that it's all related to this childhood aversion to being singled out for accomplishment.* James frequently repeated the idea of minimalizing his achievements for others.

## Gifted Reading

James enjoyed reading fiction as a child and adolescent but found his passion for learning among nonfiction books. James had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and used books to meet this need. James spoke about using the Dewey Decimal system in the library to peruse the nonfiction sections: *I remember that when I was a little younger, maybe first or second grade, I would haunt the nonfiction section in the children's section. I was interested in magic books. I basically used books as a kid to learn and to teach myself things. I learned a lot of unusual things. I taught myself how to play the piano from books at the public library and taught myself how to play golf...a strange skill to learn from library books. I learned a lot about electronics. I learned how to design computers from books in the library.* Eventually, he worked through all of the nonfiction magic books in the library's children's section, but then he realized it was *hollow* because *magic isn't real; they're just tricks.* This was his impetus to move sections in the library: *I started gravitating more toward the adult nonfiction section where the real magic was—electronics and science and whatnot. I would get these books that would explain how a flashlight worked or something, and then I would build one and bring it to school. I remember my third-grade teacher sending me to the principal's office to show what I had built from the library books. I can remember sitting there more than once next to other boys who were sent there for fighting, and I remember being mocked or jeered at while we waited. I stopped bringing my creations after a while because I felt that it wasn't worth the ridicule.*

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

James enjoyed both fiction and nonfiction as a child and adolescent. He preferred reading science fiction and dystopian fiction, but he has always read and relied upon nonfiction as his primary preference. As a child and adolescent, he shared, *we had the obligatory set of Encyclopedia Britannica volumes*. Then as he reminded me that there was no internet at the time, he admitted, *if I was bored, I might go grab a volume and just start thumbing through it*. As an adolescent, James spoke about reading books about *heavy, complex music*. He revealed, *I used to read books about biographies of composers. I probably read 15 books about Gustav Mahler and Johann Sebastian Bach*.

In line with enjoying science fiction, James gravitated toward books about space exploration. During his teenage years, he would have his first exposure to his meaningful book, Gateway, and a return to science fiction. Additionally, during this time of his life, James reflected on his upbringing with his devout Lutheran mother and completing his confirmation, which he felt was *very isolating*. He remembered: *In my teenage years, through my own sort of self-exploration and reading, I really came to reject all of that, [which] created a lot of friction with my mom. I tended to start gravitating more toward science fiction—I think because I was looking for answers that I wasn't getting through the more traditional upbringing that I had*. Also, during this period of time, James acknowledged: *I read the book Contact, and I was really moved by that book. I also read Asimov; I think Asimov was probably an atheist. [Robert A.] Heinlein...all the kind of classic sci-fi guys*. In his 20s, James shared he read all the Michael Crichton books, which *he found to be sort of lighter than the science fiction stuff that I really liked*. In his 30s, he

read Neil Stephenson novels. In his 40s, James spoke about reading The Martian and Cryptonomicon, both he enjoyed immensely.

James will abandon books if he does not enjoy them. He shared that his wife bought him the first book of The Baroque Cycle, Quicksilver. Where he enjoyed Stephenson's voice in Cryptonomicon, he did not in Quicksilver. He recalled: *I forced myself to read 100 pages [of these] thousand-page books. They're insane. I couldn't stand it and thought, 'Is this the same author? I just cannot get into this.'* I remember abandoning that. Over his lifetime, he has tried a few other books but cannot engage with them enough to want to finish them. James conceded, *I've tried a few times to read Stranger in a Strange Land. It just hasn't clicked with me. I never got into Arthur C. Clarke. I loved the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey and all the HAL 9000 stuff I think is fantastic...just not the book.*

James indicated as a child and adolescent, he read as a form of entertainment and escape, but that has changed since he became an adult. He described reading as an opportunity to *give your brain a vacation*. He shared: *I used to enjoy reading quite a bit. Now I really just read out of necessity to still learn stuff. Part of my job is to constantly learn, and I have to process lots of objective information. So in that sense, I don't really derive as much pleasure out of reading. It's more of a physical exercise. I'd like to read more again, but it's time-consuming.* James reflected he was not sure when he stopped reading frequently, but felt it was after having children and the internet. James shared, *One thing I that I've run into, too, which has always caused me anxiety is selecting a book from the internet. There's no library near me for me to go to, and the libraries in*

*Colorado Springs really kind of stink. This is like one row of what I grew up in. James spoke about his mother, father, and sister being fast readers, finishing a book in a day that would take him a week. He clarified: I also felt my time became more precious. I think as I got older and I got a lot of anxiety about selecting a book, I'd obsess over picking because it's an investment in time. I'm not a super-fast reader. I felt like I had a lot invested in picking a book, and after a while, it just became like a stalemate, mentally trying to select books to read.*

James supposed he spends an hour a day reading the news on the internet but *misses reading fiction*. He shared that over the previous summer, he read an autobiography Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut's Journeys. When asked to reflect on his book choices, James revealed: *I think especially at a certain point in my life when I got older, reading about interesting people became fascinating. I think the other thing that happened was I felt like I picked a few fiction books that were total dogs. I forced myself to read 30 pages, and I was like, 'I can't get through this. This is a terrible book.' It kind of killed my interest, whereas if you read someone's autobiography, something that's interesting to me, I know there's going to be interesting stuff in there. It's interesting in its own way. I think I've read various astronaut autobiographies. I've read a really interesting biography of Seymour Cray, a famous supercomputer designer from the 1960s and 70s. He founded great research and supercomputers.*

James often used books to reflect on himself and others and as an opportunity to discover new knowledge. He spoke of a character in The Informant helping him better understand one of his former bosses. He recalled, *They groomed this guy as an informant,*

*and the guy was nuts. He was a compulsive liar and a fascinating individual with various neuroses. And the book struck me because I had a boss once that was very similar to him.* James searched for a parallel to his life in his reading, often making connections even when his book selection was not made purposefully to fill those voids. Finally, as mentioned earlier, James relied on succinct reading. As a microconsumer of information, he spoke of getting a coffee table book, The Century. He reminisced, *It was fascinating. And in trying to get my kids to read it...this is just one of these books where you can just pick it up and read a chapter and spend a half hour reading a chapter and just learn about some period of the 20th century, and there are lots of photographs. The part about World War Two is just horrific. I mean really touching.* James searched for knowledge in his books. He does not read romance or murder mystery novels.

James preferred to read mostly digitally. He does read on a tablet, but typically uses his laptop for reading. He tends to have a paper copy if he is reading a novel. James has tried using audiobooks when he goes on road trips, and he listens to podcasts. He reflected, *I should maybe try to do more of that. I particularly enjoy audio radio programs like This American Life. Sometimes I listen to Radiolab and things like that. I used to get ideas for books to read from some of those radio programs.* In April 2023, James added that he has been listening to The Daily, a New York Times podcast since each episode is 20 minutes, the duration of his drive to pick up his daughter from school. James continued to be a microconsumer of news as it met his intellectual needs without requiring a long commitment.



## ***Reading Environments***

James has always read books in bed. He joked, *everybody reads in bed, right?* He also reflected that he would *stretch out on the couch and read*. In school, he recounted, *I can remember being so engrossed in books that I would read in school when I wasn't supposed to be*. He also relayed stories of reading while working. In high school, he worked for a music company and was allowed to read as long as there were no customers, or he did not ignore them when they walked in. The second story was after his freshman year of college when he worked in a warehouse and got into trouble for reading the operator's manual for a forklift. He remembered getting called into the boss's office, *I went in there, and he told me, 'What do you think you're doing? Somebody saw you reading on the job. You are not to be reading.'* I found it ironic because now as an engineer, *a big portion of my day is reading*.

## **James' Meaningful Book**

James' meaningful book is Gateway; he read it for the first time when he was 13 years old and has read it at least ten times. It was chance that he found the novel, but Frederik Pohl, the author, lived in a *neighboring suburb* where James grew up. He shared, *I never met him. But the library, of course, had all of his books*. Gateway, a Hugo Award<sup>6</sup> winner, checked James' preferences: it is science fiction, accurate, and has complex and intriguing characters. James added, *A lot of the stuff I read was very*

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<sup>6</sup> The Hugo Award is a literary award given annually for the previous year for the best science fiction or fantasy work. This winner is chosen by its members and is considered the premier award in science fiction.

science-based. Frederick Pohl was a stickler for details about the physics of his universe. *It had to be plausible.* Gateway's plot revolves around the main character, Robinette Broadhead. It is told in alternating timelines between Robin's experiences on Gateway and on Earth in sessions with an AI Freudian therapist program, which he names Sigfrid von Shrink.

James shared he had tried to find Gateway as an adult, but it was not available electronically. However, it is a book that has had an enduring impact on James. He felt conflicted about if he should reread the book, though he felt he wanted to after I told him I had read it before our second interview. James admitted: *That book I read probably at a very formative time in my teenage years. It was probably the first book I read [where] the character was not just two-dimensional. This character in this fiction novel...I mean, it's science fiction, so it's not realistic, but the character had real problems. He had real psychological problems. It was like this person had some darkness to their experience. And, you know, at that time growing up, I mean, that's sort of a time, I think, when boys, well, kids in general, probably start to recognize a little bit about their own mortality. I kind of went through my own sort of existential depression at the time. I would say that book really resonated.*

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

James spoke about identifying with characters and characteristics in novels and using them to decipher both positive and negative attributes. Referencing his meaningful book, James shared: *I feel like I kind of identified with Robin, although he's this sort of*

*full-grown man who has all these vices and drinks a lot. As a kid, it's like he wasn't like me, but he was just haunted by various things, and I identified with that. I can remember reading certain characters or even real people in finding character traits that I liked. And in trying to assimilate those into my own personality a bit. James added, I think there's also this dark side to it, which is that I would recognize traits that were bad. And I would also try to make a very deliberate effort to avoid being like that.*

James discovered through books both positive and negative traits of characters and grew to understand different perceptions of intelligent people. Many of our conversations about the characters in his selected books revolved around searching for identity and a sense of belonging. He suggested the novel The Supermen: The Story of Seymour Cray and the Technical Wizards Behind the Supercomputer impacted his perception of intelligence. James reflected: *In a lot of ways, my personality is probably similar to Seymour Cray in that he's a very introverted, quiet guy, super sharp with numbers, and that sort of thing. But he was kind of an asshole. He didn't treat his coworkers very well. I don't think he treated his family very well. So, I would read about him, and intellectually I aspired to be as good as he was. This was when I was much younger, of course, but in terms of his level of empathy for others, I need to do better.* James reflected that as a child, he struggled with social cues, and he shared, *through reading, I improved my ability to be more empathetic and likeable.* James was searching for moments where he felt less isolated, and the characters embodied his feelings. He added, *The feeling that there are other people struggling. I had an understanding and*

*identification that other people have been through this. But you're not alone in the fear and the struggle.*

James also spoke about identifying with different characters throughout his career when retrospectively speaking about the novel The Soul of a New Machine, which he first read at 17 years old and then again in his 30s. James recalled: *When I think of that book, there's a character I identify with now that I didn't identify with when I read it. But, in my 50s now, I identify with—and though it's been a long time since I read it, I still remember his name—Carl Alsing, and he was sort of this patriarch on the team. He wasn't a manager, but he was sort of this older guy who had been there and done that. He took more of an interest in sort of watching the others. And that's how he engaged with the author in sharing his perspectives on what drove the younger people who were in this more driven state like I was when I was younger. That book, in a way, has almost been a roadmap for my career. There are different characters at different stages of their career that I have identified with along the way.* In April 2023, James added that he had changed companies and was immediately placed in a mentorship role, not unlike Carl Alsing. James, who has been at the top of his field for over a decade and now worked at his dream company, spoke about the importance of mentoring, even if he sometimes felt he was not up to the task. This novel illustrated the precedence that there are social connections in engineering: *people need to be whole in order to perform.*

### ***Catharsis***

James spoke of his most compelling moments of catharsis coming from Gateway. In the novel, Robin Broadhead comes from a turbulent home with a strained relationship

with his mother, unlike how James initially described his relationship with his mother when he read the novel. Robin goes to the titular Gateway, an asteroid hollowed out by a long-lost race of aliens. There, Robin meets Klara, a woman who would become his girlfriend. On their third trip, chaos ensues as they end up in the gravitational pull of a black hole. Thinking he is sacrificing himself, Robin thrusts his ship from the other ship, but it allows Robin to escape and dooms Klara and all other persons aboard to a slow death, haunting Robin throughout the book and series. In the novel, Robin has survivor's guilt for experience, which he does not realize until the end of the novel after working through therapy since he had blocked it out. This is reminiscent of James' guilt over the patent and interactions outside the principal's office. In each of these instances, James struggled with the emotional complexities of the situation.

James admitted the feeling of survivor's guilt resonated with him and was probably the reason he was so drawn to the novel in his adolescence. He spoke about his mother being unforgiving of his older sister and that it was almost *ritualistic* in the way his mother would criticize his sister nightly. James reflected: *I basically withdrew emotionally. I had a pretty restricted social life in high school. I never went to a school dance. I never had a girlfriend. I had really only a couple of friends that I hung out with who were good friends. I always felt very socially awkward. And I hated my mom.* He recalled his final summer coming home following his freshman year of college as his catalyst to leave. With a retrospective look, James said: *Ultimately, I left, and I never really came home after that. That was pretty much the end of that. That was the end of my childhood. I went back to college, and from then on, I stayed there. I would come home*

*for visits, but I was basically done. I realize now that I think that is what I identify with Robin Broadhead...a shared sense of survivor's guilt.* James revealed that he never understood why he felt *so attached* to Robin in the book, but as an adult looking back, he could reflect on it. James reiterated, *The broken family dynamic and the feeling that I failed my sister. It's sort of that feeling of abandoning somebody that you should care for.*

### ***Insight***

James engaged in insight, or the transfer of a character's personality or motivations allowing for reflection. James frequently spoke about feeling isolated, and that books resonated with him to address this, though, in retrospect, it was all unconsciously. James disclosed: *I have always been drawn to biographies about extraordinary scientists and composers, I think, to feel a connection to other gifted individuals. I hope that doesn't come off as arrogant because I truly do not believe I'm anywhere as special as someone like Bach, Mahler, or Einstein. But I always wondered if they felt a more ordinary kind of loneliness as a result of their intellect, something I could relate to.*

James often used music during his formative teenage years as a vein for more profound insight. He spoke of going through a Mahler phase when he was younger and feeling *emotionally attached or addicted to the music of Mahler*. He recalled reading several books about Mahler, and the resonating theme was the idea of mortality. He shared that Mahler was diagnosed with a heart condition in his 40s, told he would not live long and was superstitious. Mahler was a fan of Beethoven and Bruckner, and both died after completing nine symphonies. James acknowledged that Mahler tried to cheat death:

*After he wrote his Eighth Symphony, he wrote another symphony, but it was a symphony that was based on vocal music. It's amazing. He refused to call it a symphony, thinking he could cheat death by not calling it his Ninth Symphony. And sure enough, that's what he did. He didn't die, and he later wrote his Ninth Symphony. It was something that I could not get over. It even brings back sort of emotional feelings now. I've read a lot of books about him when I was a teenager, and I think that that tied into some of what I was going through with my sense of mortality that I developed as a teenager. It was upsetting to realize that, eventually, this is all going to come to an end when you're 13 or 14 years old. So, I dug pretty deep into that with him because I feel like Mahler went through this, and he went through it with his music. So, I read everything I could about him when I was that age, which is pretty weird for a freshman.* James reflected that at this time in his life, as he questioned faith and the afterlife, he searched for insight from others who *walked before him and how they managed their mortality*. James suggested that this time period was the end of his innocence and childhood, as the girl who lived across the street committed suicide due to bullying. James knew the girl through her older brother, and she was just one year younger than him. Retrospectively, this was an additional catalyst for him to question the impermanence of life, and he turned to art to find others struggling with the same thing.

### ***Universalization***

James engaged in universalization or applying what has been read to the reader's life. Regarding Robin Broadhead, James was able to use characteristics to his demeanor. James recollected: *I think I admired his sort of worldliness. You like the guy. He's maybe*

*a little crass and done some unsavory things, but he kind of had these demons that he had buried in himself. What a great character, especially for an adolescent kid struggling with his own sense of despair.* James spoke about struggling with despair and trying to find his place in the world during his adolescence, so it seems only natural that he would gravitate to a book with a character in a similar turmoil. Additionally, Gateway speaks about isolation. Both Robin and the entire human race are in different levels of isolation. James reflected that this understanding of isolation was essential to his understanding of himself as an adolescent. In the book series, they eventually realize that advanced alien civilizations still exist, thus changing the notion of being alone. The idea of overcoming loneliness may have assisted James with a better understanding of who he was in the world and how it would impact him long-term.

James spoke about applying characteristics of fictional characters to his own life. For example, he recounted, *In Cryptonomicon, there's a character in the book who is a very skilled computer programmer. I remember reading that book when I was younger and thinking, 'Hey, that guy is really good at this, kind of like me. And he's normal.' It's like he's a normal character who's actually kind of likable, so maybe it's okay to be kind of a computer geek, and actually, you could still be a likable person.* James frequently spoke about the dichotomous relationship between being smart and being liked. He shared stories about diminishing his self-worth and success to avoid negative interactions, specifically when he shared about adding people to his patent and refusing to bring in his creations to avoid ridicule.



## Reading to Address Affective Needs

James spoke of reading to meet his socioemotional needs, including anxiety and perfectionism. As mentioned earlier, James has anxiety over selecting books because he dreads putting effort into something he cannot or will not finish. He longs for his childhood days, perusing the library's bookshelves. Regarding his perfectionism, James divulged, *In my case, it probably has bridged a little bit into obsessive compulsiveness in some ways. When I was a child, but probably even into my teenage years, I had to make sure that my room was arranged perfectly. I think books or magazines on my shelves had to be at perfect right angles and things like that before I could go to bed.* However, this attention to detail has made him successful in his chosen profession, where he relies on specificity and accuracy. James affirmed, *I worked very hard and tried to do perfect work.* However, about ten years ago, he was blindsided at work by his job changing when his position was sold to another company, which caused him to feel less productive. As a result, James suggested, *I went through a period of depression. I would say work life-wise, I'm not sure I am fully over it. I haven't been very productive in the last ten years, but I feel, in reality, I probably have been—just in different ways than I'm used to.*

In his 30s, James read Crichton's *Airframe*, which he found helpful at that stage in his career. He acknowledged: *I just remember that there was a sort of optimism, and by optimism, I mean, it was like people solving problems through science and engineering. There was some sort of an engineering failure, and the investigators applied logic and reasoning to figure it out. That really appealed to me more in my 20s and 30s. I would say I was less searching for deep answers and more kind of looking for motivation,*

*things to kind of fuel me in my workaholism.* When discussing work, James spoke of the lingering effects of this job transition. He recalled feeling *very capable* in his job field when he was in his 30s and 40s and that he *developed humility* during that time. He added: *I don't know that I was arrogant as much as I was intolerant of others when they couldn't grasp things rapidly. I think that in my recent years, I think it's almost more like a midlife burnout on work. I was very passionate about what I did for many, many years. I was a workaholic. I poured myself into it to the detriment of my wife and my family. And then, when I had this life-changing, career-changing event, I became very disillusioned with work, and I'm still getting through that.*

Furthermore, James spoke of combatting imposter syndrome frequently throughout his life. James considered: *I've become aware of the very popular notions of the Dunning-Kruger scale and things like that. I've come to recognize that I have pretty deep insecurities about my ability to perform. Yet, I also acknowledge that I seem to be valued quite highly by the organization I work in. I accept that, but I can't fully reconcile it because I still don't feel terribly productive.* Though, he admitted books like Airframe and The Soul of a New Machine helped him better recognize the evolution of his career trajectory.

He read Living with Intensity after I recommended it in our first interview. Though he had been reading it in hopes of helping himself with his three children, he could see the potential insights for himself. He acknowledged, *I think it is also sort of potentially helpful in understanding and improving the experience for all of my kids, maybe myself as well. I have some stickers on various things as well—the three levels of*

*individual development. That's a powerful concept. You know, the other thing that really resonates is the overexcitabilities.* He also spoke about the frequent intermixing of music and novels. This may have met his sensual OE, as it provided an outlet for multiple levels of engagement with books. While reading Gateway, he spoke about listening to Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony and how he has vividly interconnected that symphony to the novel.

As an adult, James is a microconsumer of information, as earlier referenced. This allows him to meet his intellectual OE with small time commitments, which is all he has now. Throughout his lifespan, James also taught himself how to do things through nonfiction. As mentioned, he used nonfiction books to teach himself how to use computers, play golf, and play musical instruments. James marveled: *I taught myself to play the piano from library books. We had in our dingy, unfinished basement what's called a reed organ. This was something that I think was more common in the middle 20th century, maybe the 40s, 50s. This is not really an electronic instrument; it is more like an electric acoustic instrument. And you could push any number of keys all at once, and they would all be together so you could get polyphony. I was fascinated by that. So, I got a book out of the library—it was the craziest thing—it was a book that listed all the music notes for every chord, all the complicated chords. So, I would pick out the notes on this organ and listen to the way they sounded. I would sit for hours, day after day, and just pick my way through and learn how to play these chords. Once I had memorized how to play all these chords from this book, I then realized that I could pick up a piece of music and look at it and recognize it.* James shared that eventually, his parents were

fascinated by this and bought him a *cheap imitation* of a piano, a *Casio keyboard*. He would go on to check out more books from the library, *Some were sheet music, and some were books and music theory*. James then added, *Eventually, my parents bought a piano.*

### ***Social Isolation***

James repeatedly spoke about feeling isolated and finding some solace in his books. As mentioned earlier, in elementary, James talked about being bullied by boys when he would show his creations to the principal, thus making him feel even more lonely. In high school, he continued to feel isolated. He divulged: *I was exceptionally gifted in mathematics. Almost peerless, in a way. In math classes, there were only one or two other kids that I sort of identified with. I think things just came so easily to me. There was an experience I had in high school and a lot of this ties into sort of this feeling of isolation. I think it is common for gifted kids to have a sense of isolation and this desire to dumb yourself down a little bit to be more accepted by your peers. In high school, as a senior, I scored a perfect score on ACT, the math, and I aced all the calculus. I got a perfect score on the calculus AP test, and the math teacher teachers recruited me relentlessly to join the math team. I think the reason when I look back—and I didn't really understand at the time—but when I look back on it, it was that I didn't want to be a geek. I just didn't want to identify with the kids on the math team.* Eventually, James gave in and participated in the districtwide math competition, and they placed second, though James never went to practices or prepared for it. He wondered, *I was proud. But I was also like, 'I think I could have taken first.'* Then I went back to school, and I felt even

*more like a jackass. These kids on the math team that go to these practices every week, and they hated me. So, it reinforced the sense of, 'I don't want to do this.'*

James recalled that the only times he did not feel so isolated was when he attended a very selective engineering school which changed his view. He spoke about the culling of the group over the years positively impacting him. He admitted, *The kids there were smarter than the kids in my high school, so I felt more comfortable. Then I went into the field of chip design, and that was all the brightest kids from the engineering schools were there. And over the years, it's just come down to...I feel like I've found my people. And that's been the most rewarding.*

James' resonance with Gateway continued with Robin Broadhead's feelings of isolation throughout most of the book, even when he was with others. James' spoke of feeling this way, too. He often used books and music to combat these feelings. He talked about feeling isolated from his family and actively isolating himself from his family. James confessed, *I really isolated myself psychologically from my family. I actually retreated more into music and books, especially science fiction. But every bit as much or more into the music. I was a weird kid—probably a lot of gifted kids are weird kids. Books allowed me to feel less alone because I felt like I wasn't in a really good place.*

James turned to autobiographies and biographies to help him feel connected, and he also used metacognition to think about the isolation those persons must have had in their own lives. James divulged: *I have thought a bit more about my penchant for biographies of notable science and engineering figures. It probably has to do with dealing with my feelings of isolation in my youth. That story I told you about the school*

*district math competition is poignant to me and is a good example of an experience that made me withdraw from competitions and, really, any intellectual activity that might bring accolades. I can only imagine that isolation and loneliness is a common experience for gifted kids. While his final sentiment is accurate, it is interesting that both male participants spoke of feelings of isolation and loneliness well beyond their female counterparts.*

James also reflected on feelings of isolation in connection to the book Contact. This novel was meaningful to him for the content and the context in which it was given to him. James poignantly shared a memory reflective of this: *I actually read the book long before the movie came out. My maternal grandfather gave me the book. My grandfather and I had a special kind of peaceful bond—we were always drawn to sit together quietly and just observe the chaos of our other family members during visits. Or, we'd wander off together during a big family shopping mall trip and just sit and watch people come and go. But I was a bit puzzled that my grandfather gave me this book because my grandfather was, as far as I knew, a devoutly religious man—and yet Carl Sagan was famously an atheist. The themes in the book strongly question the validity of traditional early religions. It has always made me wonder if my grandfather questioned his own faith and that giving me the book was his way of trying to connect with someone else—only me—about his doubts. But the book, to me, is very deeply about isolation and the profound revelation, fictionally, of course, that humans are not alone in the universe. James spoke of feeling isolated when he began questioning the Lutheran faith he was*

raised in and the turmoil it brought to his relationship with his mother. If his musing is accurate, it gave him a perceived ally when he felt lonely.

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

James does not actively engage in discussions about his books. In fact, he shared that the only person he had probably ever spoken with books about was his wife. He related, *There have been a few books over the years that she and I have both read, like The Da Vinci Code and the sequel. I feel like there have been a few other novels that she had read, and she got me to read, and then we talked about it. But in general, other than that, I don't think I talk with anybody about books.*

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

James frequently engages in metacognition, or understanding your thought processes. Concerning his propensity toward mathematics and music, it was unsurprising that music helped James work better. He shared, *It just sort of calms my brain. It resonates with my head, and I can get deeper into the work. But I also play the music and dig into it in that way.* James also reiterated that he does occasionally reread passages. James reflected: *The sort of mundane reason was that I was semi-distracted when I was reading it, and I feel like there was something important there that I overlooked. In some cases, like when I think of books that really moved me, I've gone back and reread sections just to kind of savor them a little more.*

James does not annotate fiction books but will annotate information or technical books, especially when he needs to use them for reference. However, James reflected that

he incorporates annotations as almost a part of his daily life. James divulged: *I do know that some of the things I read, if they're particularly touching to me in some intellectual way, or in some cases, some of the really interesting things that some of my intellectual acquaintances, coworkers, or whoever have said or imparted to me, such as ideas or whatever, I've assimilated into my views. So, I'm quite certain that some of my expressions have come out of some of my favorite passages in books. Some of the parables I might tell my kids or coworkers or whatever come from things I've found particularly moving.*

### **Brief Analysis of James**

James read as a form of discovery over his lifespan, often using books to meet his inquisitive nature. Since childhood, James has used books to teach himself new skills and ideas, but perhaps the most profound impact was teaching himself how to play the piano through books. To James, music, math, and reading are interconnected. In his adolescence, James used science fiction books to help him question his devout upbringing finding solace in critical thinkers and computer engineers. James, who often felt *peerless*, relied on books to provide examples of different ways of processing and interacting with the world around him. To please people, James would diminish his self-worth and accomplishments to bolster others, potentially as a side effect of the egomaniacal persons he read. James spoke of stifling isolation and the reprieve that books and music provided. In adulthood, James has become a microconsumer of information requiring efficient and succinct sources for new knowledge. James' did not engage in



discussions, but his recall of novels from thirty or forty years ago is remarkable, as is his metacognition about the items he reads.

### **Reyna**

*I definitely read for pleasure. I love to read for information because I want to stay informed about many, many things. I like to read international news as far as making sure that my viewpoint is not only as an American, but as a world citizen. So, I read a lot of news magazines that offer different perspectives. We travel a lot, too. We definitely, as a family, value that idea of making sure that you're learning what other cultures think about current world affairs as well. I feel sorry for people who don't read because I think they're just missing a huge part of leading an interesting life.*

### **An Introduction to Reyna**

Meetings with Reyna took place in the early mornings. Reyna said that she had been described as a *voracious reader* by her daughters and the members of her book club that she founded and has been a part of for twenty-four years, but she questioned that description of herself. Instead, she professed, *I know people that read more than I do. So, I definitely read a lot and am a huge Audible book fan. I always have an Audible book going and a hardcover book going.* Reyna and I discussed 55 books in our first two conversations. Reyna was also the only participant who engaged in discussion regularly. This is partly due to her book club, but it is also indicative of who she is as a person and reader. She spoke of reading and discussing books with her three daughters, who are all four years apart, as they grew up and in their adulthood. In addition, she discusses books that she reads daily or weekly with her husband and makes time in conversations with

friends to discuss books. In her undergraduate, she contemplated an English major, but eventually selected Sociology to graduate in four years, which was a requirement from her father. She later became a teacher and pursued a master's in English, where her thesis was on challenging gifted readers. She created an annotated bibliography that she gives to her students and tutoring families to this day, though she feels it is outdated.

Reyna, a woman in her 50s who identifies as Caucasian, was formally identified as gifted in school. She shared that there was a conversation in first grade about her and several other peers skipping second grade, but it did not occur—she did not know why, and neither did her mother, which she shared would never happen today—parents would know all of the details. She spoke about a lifelong passion for reading and higher-level English classes. Reyna is selective in her book choices, often consulting multiple lists before determining her next read. Reyna prefers to read fiction because she gets nonfiction from the news, and she shared she is bad about selecting nonfiction on her own. She disclosed, *I compel myself by usually choosing a book for our book club if it's a nonfiction book I've heard a lot about. We read the book Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson recently.* She spoke about really enjoying that book, though it was difficult to read. She also shared that she likes to remain current with children's literature because of her tutoring.

Reyna spoke to me using hand gestures to reiterate her points during our conversation. She has a deep love for literature and books. In fact, she has a business selling antiques and antique books. She loves reading historical fiction, naming Americanah and The Poisonwood Bible as two books she has *thought about often*

because she had just spoken with her daughter about them. She added that she loved reading Ahab's Wife: Or, The Star-Gazer and The People of the Book. During our second interview, she spoke of currently reading Matrix by Lauren Groff and enjoying the historical fiction perspective of Marie of France in a twelfth-century abbey. Reyna spoke about being carried away by the research Groff did for the book. Reyna admitted, *I love historical stuff, and she actually was a real person, but the book doesn't attempt to be a biography. It's really interesting. I think she researched a lot of the abbess original writings, so I'm really enjoying that.*

Reyna gravitated toward any book with an artist in it or anything with a tie to a bookstore or a librarian—and we immediately connected about loving Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore. She recommended that I read The Library Book. Most of our conversations were like this—a back and forth about books and connections to books that we have had. Reyna shared that she had just finished reading The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue and A Gentleman in Moscow, which she really enjoyed. Reyna has a predilection for strong female characters in her book selections and desires depth and complexity from the book that forces her to think. Reyna and her husband are avid travelers, and she always reads historical fiction books based on the country she travels to, along with travel books. Reyna shared that she imparted this to her children, as well, because she felt *you'll get more out of it by knowing the history of the place and the people there.*

### **Gifted Reading**

Reyna spoke about reading daily from when she wakes up until she goes to bed. She reads books on paper, but mostly prefers audiobooks and rarely uses the Kindle her

husband bought her years ago. She admitted, *I think I've always been a close listener. I have a really good memory. I don't know how that goes hand in hand, but it's lucky. And that's probably why I like audiobooks so much. I didn't really have to make much of an effort.* Reyna rarely rereads novels, typically only reading a book once. She conceded that the one exception was A Year in Provence, which she read before going to France on a trip. However, Reyna is a collector of books—mostly hardcover and children's literature. She divulged, *I'm picky about what we keep because it needs to be that level of meaningful. If I have an Audible [book] and I have absolutely loved it, I will go out and buy the actual book, even though I don't usually reread it.*

Reyna shared that she is *possessive* over her books and gets *frustrated when I lend out books and don't get them back*. Reyna reflected that she is generally *generous about books and tells people to pass them on when they're done*. However, some books became *part of my soul and really, really touch me*, and it is those books that she keeps. In April 2023, she added a book to this list, This is Happiness, which she enthused, *I just absolutely fell in love with this book. It's definitely in my top ten. I don't know what it bumped off the list, but it is definitely top ten. It was such a pleasure to have a book that was so positive*. In fact, Reyna loved this book so much that she did a rare reread of it and purchased a hard copy in addition to her audiobook.

### ***Reading Preferences and Book Selection***

As a child, Reyna read almost exclusively fiction, and she read classic books. She shared that she loved The Phantom Tollbooth and the Roald Dahl books *because he was so funny, and I still love him. He gets a little catty sometimes in some of the books. But*

*he's so funny, and I just loved those.* She shared that she read many serial books, including all of the Nancy Drew books and most of The Hardy Boys books. In high school, she transitioned to serial series of a historical nature, reading The Far Pavilions series and The Kent Family Chronicles. She shared she enjoyed serialized series as a child and recommends them still because *it's not just one-and-done. You still have those characters you've grown to love. Or in some cases, it's the same family, but it's a different generation. So even though they're not the exact same characters, they're the children. I like that continuation.*

Reyna prefers to listen to audiobooks as her primary form of reading. She shared that she prefers the *tactile* sense of holding an actual book. She does use the Kindle application to annotate her books when she needs to and as a resource when helping the students she tutors, but it is not a preferred way for her to read—apart from when they are traveling. She related a story of carrying a hardcover book to an island where they had to take planes and boats to get there; she told her husband, *I'm never doing this again, lugging a hardcover book everywhere.* Reyna contemplated not remembering the first audiobook she listened to, though she thought that would be interesting to know. But, she recalled, *I think I was hooked on audiobooks from the beginning. I just know that it was with the kids. We loved Harry Potter and really got into that. I love to read aloud, and we read most of them aloud. But then Audible was so good that it was like, 'I can't compete with that. He was amazing,' Jim Dale, the British theater actor.*

Reyna spoke about book club members commenting over the years on her use of audiobooks and their inability to pay attention to an audiobook. However, Reyna shared,

*I'm a careful listener. So, there are times when we're in a book club discussion that certain people who have read the book won't remember a detail, but I will. Some people might say, 'Oh, well, you know, when you listen to a book, it's not the same.' And that may be true for a certain person. I'd buy into that. But for me, I don't find that there's any less comprehension. Reyna does not readily abandon books. She acknowledged, I don't think I've ever abandoned an audiobook for the fact that I didn't feel like I was comprehending it well enough. I've abandoned once where I didn't like the reader.*

Reyna disclosed that she only listens to books at the 1x speed, even if she needs to finish a book for book club. Instead, she will just make time to listen to the book more frequently. Reyna also shared that she and her husband listen to audiobooks together while traveling by car; the last book they finished was Between the World and Me.

Reyna read for information and entertainment, though she favored fiction over nonfiction. Even if she did not facilitate a monthly book club, reading would be a natural part of her life. She confessed, *I do gravitate to certain books. I really do like to read the best of the best. And I would like to go back and read some classics because I don't have this idea it's not valuable. A lot of people in the book club will say, 'Well, that's a really old book.' I don't think that that necessarily means it's not something we should read. One of my favorite book club books this past six months was a book that was published, I think, in the 50s or 60s, and one person's comment had been like, 'Why would I want to read that?' I don't think that matters. There are certain books where the language is challenging. I don't want to read The Scarlet Letter again. But I do like it to be this rise to the top kind of book. And I don't always love our book club books. I'm reading an*

*Alaska book right now, and it is nonfiction; I picked it up when we were in Alaska. It makes me want to go back and explore more, too. I always like to read something entertaining or interesting.*

Reyna preferred historical novels, historical fiction, and travel-based books. She actively avoids the genres of science fiction and dystopian books. However, there are some exceptions to this rule. Reyna shared that she loves Star Wars, but only the movies. She stressed, *the books are bad*. As for dystopian books, Reyna clarified, *I don't really like dystopian books, especially now that we're living dystopian enough. Although some of the dystopian children's literature like The Hunger Games and Divergent and others were very compelling. Those were really, really interesting to read, even though I thought The Hunger Games was obscene when I first heard about it, but it did end up being interesting*. Reyna also reflected that she does not like the romance genre because she *needs the book to offer more*. She shared that she read many trash romance novels in high school and college, but she no longer enjoys them. Conversely, she reflected that she *loved, loved, loved Normal People by Sally Rooney. That's a beautiful book, and she's an amazing writer. I did not like the second one I read of hers, which I think came first—Conversations with Friends. I think I was just too old for that character, the twenty-something who is angsty.*

Reyna and I spoke about adaptations of books. Reyna avowed, *The book is always better. But it's rare that occasionally the series is better*. Reyna spoke about loving the Harry Potter film adaptation and recently watching the anniversary special. Although she shared, *I cried, and that was wonderful. It's funny how often it was passed off to a*

*different director, but I just loved the adaptation, and I thought it was amazing. The casting was amazing down to every last person and what they did with it. If ever there was a happy author, it should be J.K. because they did an amazing job with it. And once in a while, they improve it, like with Outlander. Reyna revealed that she prefers the Outlander television series to the books where they removed some of the drama and silliness from the books. She felt the books should have been edited because there was always something happening to the main character that was ridiculous. She reiterated, I don't like it when a book or series takes you into disbelief...it takes you out of the moment, and you're like, 'Okay, that's not consistent with that character. They wouldn't do that.' That frustrates me. Another series that she favors the movies is The Lord of the Rings, stating, I know it's such a deeply meaningful book for a lot of people, but I never got into it.*

Reyna is a discerning reader and very seldomly abandons books; she shared she feels guilty when I do, so I try to finish my book. Reyna explained: *I'm so picky about how I choose books. If someone says this is a great read, or I read about it across five publications, it's like, 'Okay, I need to stick to that.'* In fact, I did reread The Elegance of the Hedgehog because I didn't like it, and a friend who talked to me that loved it. I thought I had to go back to this book because I know this friend really well, and if she loved it, I must have missed some things. I did get a lot of value the second time around in reading that. Reyna relies on others to determine the novels she will read. Reyna shared that she often reads two books concurrently—one physical copy and one audiobook, though they are not the same book. Reyna's reading selection is adaptable



based on what she has recently read. She admitted, *If I do read a present-day novel, which I'm not opposed to that at all, I'll also read something in a different time frame afterward, just because I don't want to be in that time frame again so soon.* Reyna becomes so engrossed in the time period that she must leave it.

### ***Reading Environments***

As a child, Reyna reflected that she mainly read in her bedroom or the library. Although she recounted being sent to the library after finishing coursework, *I remember doing that a lot in school, just being able to get through what I needed to get through and move on to what I wanted to read.* She spoke about checking out the majority of her books from her school library as a child and adolescent reader. However, as an adult, she is *not much of a library user; I like to own my books.*

As an adult, Reyna listens to audiobooks in the car, in bed, and all around her house. Both Reyna and her husband read books at night instead of watching television. She shared that as an empty nester, she wakes up and reads every morning in bed and at night, but, she expounded, *I listen every night before I go to sleep. Every night, I go to sleep with my audiobook. And then, as I get woken up throughout the night if I can't get back to sleep, I put it back in. So, I would say probably 30 to 40 percent of the audiobook is listened to at night or throughout the night with insomnia.* Relatedly, Reyna revealed that when nursing her daughter, she would listen to audiobooks alone in the middle of the night. She shared a *famous story* about her being so engrossed in an audiobook that she missed her exit driving in college, *Back when it was tapes, tons of tapes, I listened to Watership Down on a trip from Boulder to go see my grandparents in western Nebraska,*

*and I drove past their town. I'd done that drive my entire life, and I drove 40 miles past the town, listening to Watership Down, so I turned around and listened to it some more while I drove back to their town.*

### **Reyna's Meaningful Book**

Reyna's meaningful book was The People of the Book, though she had only read it once over a decade ago. Something about the novel resonated with her, leaving a mark well after she had finished the story. The novel checks many boxes that Reyna gravitates toward in a book—it's historical fiction, has an artistic element, and has a strong female main character, so it seems clear why this book would endure in her memory. The novel takes place in 1996, when Hanna Heath, an Australian rare book expert, is offered the job of her dreams—analysis, and conservation of the famous Sarajevo Haggadah, which was rescued during the Bosnian war from Serb shelling. The book has two concurrent plots—that of Hanna conserving the book and the history of the part of the book that requires the conservation, thus taking the reader on a journey through centuries of war and exile from the book's salvation to its creation, working backward. The novel is inspired by a true story.

However, the most interesting element and connection toward the book that Reyna herself did not remember or acknowledge was the strained relationship Hanna Heath has with her mother in the novel—a relationship that echoes Reyna's with her mother. As I read The People of the Book, I saw the parallels between Reyna and Hanna, where both women eventually stand on their own against their domineering mothers. Yet, Reyna did not remember that storyline. It is possible that she did not engage with it in the

same way, but she could have blocked it because it was too much for her to process. Regardless, it is interesting to note that Hanna, the main character, eventually distances herself from her mother in the book, just as Reyna has with her mother. When I asked Reyna about the relationship parallel, she shared, *I'm going to have to reread it. I think a lot of my relationship with my mom [had] a ton of adaptation of how to be her adult daughter and try to please her. It took a long time because my mom was so easy to make mad...and you never wanted mom to be mad at you. I did all that in a very adaptive way, unconsciously, until I realized I can't do this anymore.* Therefore, the evolution of Reyna's relationship with her mother matches the novel's elements.

## **The Bibliotherapeutic Process**

### ***Identification***

Reyna contemplated she does not often relate to the characters she reads in adulthood because *I don't read books about middle-aged women very often.* However, earlier in her life, she recognized pieces of herself in characters for a book. She disclosed, *When I was raising my kids, reading a book with a mother that was struggling with all the responsibilities, I could relate. Or when I was a teen and reading a book about a teen, having difficulty figuring out the world.* Reyna connected with the struggles of the main character, Meggie, in The Thorn Birds and the titular Margaret in Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. Something about Meggie and Margaret left a lingering impression as she recalled their names and characteristics forty years after reading the stories. Reyna did, however, connect specifically with the birth order of the characters in Little House on the Prairie. Reyna reflected, *I grew up with three girls also. So that helped me identify*

*with being the oldest and the responsible sister. I actually do have a crazy middle sister who was difficult to deal with and still is actually. So, in that way, I think that book I really related to the family of girls.* Reyna also has three daughters, so she found the parallel between sisters as something she could relate to.

Reyna also connected to the characters in Little Women, though she shared she thought it was a *hard read and did not time travel as well as other books* when she tried to read it to her daughters. However, they still watch the movie every year, clarifying it has to be the Winona Ryder edition. Reyna shared that she and her sisters are named similarly to the characters in Little Women and that her mother liked their names, though she did not do it purposefully, it just fell into place. As for embodying some characterizations, Reyna reflected that *Mary was far more patient than I have ever been, but I might have tried to just be the calmer, more responsible one when Amy was going off the wall.*

Finally, in her childhood, Reyna suggested that the novel Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. was one of the novels that she felt was *revolutionary*. She believed, *It was just a breakthrough for recognizing what a young girl would be going through.* When I asked her if she could share any details, she said, *You know, it's been so long...I just remember that it really was impactful at the time, so I'm sure that it just allowed you to feel that it was okay to be going through these emotions and these changes, and it was validating.* This sentiment echoes beyond multiple participants, especially regarding this novel in particular. Reyna also reflected that it is interesting that Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. remains controversial today, just as it was when it came out in 1970.

## ***Catharsis***

Reyna speaks of catharsis, or emotional release, from reading happens regularly for her, but she struggled to name specific examples. She confessed: *I'm almost always having an emotional reaction. The book Normal People, which they made into a really good series that Hulu produced, and I was so involved with those characters. I missed them afterward. I thought about them and their relationship and the depth of their different paths and stuff. So, I feel like it's almost sad if the book didn't really do a good job or if you didn't get engaged with the characters.* Reyna spoke of book characters in our conversations as if they were old friends.

Reyna's most poignant example of catharsis was reading a book a friend had recommended to her. She shared that she had wished she had read Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers twenty years before she did. At one point, her sister had recommended the book to her, but she did not read it then, though she wished, in retrospect, she had. Reyna reflected: *I read a book that was recommended that helped me understand my mom and her mental illness a lot. I'm not a big self-help person...it's just not what I choose to read. It's not that I don't think it's really valuable, but that particular book I should have read 20 years ago to try to understand my mom. It's called the perfect description: Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers.* When I asked Reyna to share more about this novel, she reiterated, *it just was like light bulb moment after light bulb moment, and there would be a list of behaviors, and I'm like, 'Oh my God, this is like a textbook version of what I've lived with.'* So, it was super helpful. The roots of bibliotherapy are

rooted in developmental bibliotherapy, wherein self-help novels are used to help persons understand something about themselves. However, Reyna's example helped her understand a person in her life. The reading of this novel provided catharsis for her.

### ***Insight***

Reyna also had insight, or thinking about the book and the context beyond her initial read, when she read Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers. Reyna divulged the book was: *Unbelievable—it's highlighted everywhere, and it helped me understand a person with who I've just struggled for a long, long time. It was great. I wish I would have read it earlier. It might have helped me understand it and understand her and stand up to her a little bit more, which may have overall helped our relationship. But I'm glad I at least read it when I did because it made me understand why she does the things she does and why I feel the way I do about the way she acts and the way she treats me and other people. So that was really helpful.*

Reyna also shared that she wondered if she had read Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers sooner if it could have impacted the deterioration of their relationship. Then, she mused: *I could have understood what my mom's mental illness was all about, and maybe I could have done some things differently that would have led to a different outcome in our relationship. I don't have deep regrets about that, but it would have been nice to have had that. I suppose that would have required me when I started seeing cracks in our relationship, which was about the time when she stopped being able to manipulate me so much. Honestly, now that I've looked*

*back on everything and done some therapy, it would have been very key to have done that at the time and then been able to set up boundaries with her.*

As mentioned earlier, Reyna discussed how she read every Nancy Drew book as a child. Although she reflected that she completed the series, *it probably was because I was such a reader. So, I'm sure that did inform me, as far as you know my resilience.* Nancy Drew is often a resilient, independent, and fearless amateur sleuth. Many of these traits Reyna discussed as appreciating the characters in the books she reads. She added, *I think that there are definitely characters that are inspirational. And so you take there, whether it's their work ethic or their curiosity or their stamina, whatever it is, and think [of ways to incorporate that].* In her adult reading, she still favors strong female characters. She divulged, *I think that's probably what Kristin Hannah does so well is, you know, she always has strong female characters. She's a beloved author for that reason of having these strong female characters that really do whatever they need to do for their families to get through whatever it is, depression or illness or whatever.* Reyna seems to relate these characteristics to her life, though she would be slow to admit it.

### ***Universalization***

Reyna's application of novels to her life linked to Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers. This book allowed Reyna to reflect and apply elements of the book to her life. She shared that the novel helped her understand how familial narcissism is within families and that her mother had it, and her maternal grandfather did the same things. So, she clarified, *it's very familial, and that helped me to understand why it was familial. And then I have a sister who's doing and acting the same*

*way...whether it's biological or just behavioral. It's definitely passed down in the family. So that has helped me. I think also it helped me almost do the opposite. Reyna later added that she might have been a different mother if she had read it earlier. But, she revealed, fortunately, I read it after my dad died, which has been five and a half years. It was a little late, and luckily, personality-wise, I was a lot more like my dad than I even realized. I think because I loved children and working with children, I did a good job with that. There were some things that, if I had read it earlier, I definitely would have been able to not make some mistakes that I did make.*

Reyna reflected on Count the Ways' poignant impact on her when she read it recently. The novel is about a mother of three children as she reminisces over her life—the painful truths and moments of joy of motherhood. As a mother of three, Reyna read this book when her youngest daughter was 18. Reyna ruminated, *It was one of the most profound books I've read about raising children, about motherhood. It was really profoundly true in all the joys, how difficult the challenges are, the pain, and the worry of raising kids. The novel not only focuses on raising young children, but she also talks about her current relationship with those grown children. And there are a few things that she talked about with the grown children that really stuck with me. Accepting your grown adult children for who they are and making sure that you still act like a parent because you still have so much influence, even though they're grown adults. Reading this novel and her relationship with her mother improved the cognizance of her actions with her children. She concluded, *Parenthood is a balance of advice and acceptance.**



## Reading to Address Affective Needs

Reyna spoke about isolation and selecting books to help her *escape* during that part of her life. She shared that as an adolescent, *it was really hard. We moved after seventh grade to a whole different part of the country, and then two years later, we moved back. I was in junior high when we moved in high school when we moved back. And that was hard to be a new kid both those times. But mostly, what I was reading then was escapist stuff like The Far Pavilion, set in India, and that colonial series. I read a lot of romance junk in high school. I think it was really more escapist stuff.* The idea of escaping from reality and life's challenges through books is a common theme among all participants. However, in line with this, Reyna reflected, *It would be interesting to know what was available when I was growing up. It seems like there's so much more available now for kids having any particular struggle than there ever was when I was growing up.* She shared that the only books that felt *readily available* were Judy Blume and Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret. *They were pivotal for all of us going through that, all the girls. I bet you couldn't find a woman my age that didn't read that book when we were in sixth or seventh grade. That was just groundbreaking at the time. Now I just think there's so many more resources available. There's a lot more awareness of talking about our real problems.* However, she admitted she does not seek books where the main character is isolated, and her immediate response was that it made her feel *claustrophobic*. Reyna's example was Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine, *which starts out with a main character who is a very, very lonely person. If it's going to start out that way, please*

*make it get better. Not that it has to be roses; I have loved books that have very tragic stories, but not the whole thing.*

Reyna also related her struggle with perfectionism and that it is *difficult*. She elucidated, *you learn as you age not to be as hard on yourself about those kinds of things. So that's, I think, the gift of middle age. You just let things go. Especially as women and as teachers, we're so used to doing and helping and saying yes. And I think in middle age, you learn to say, no, I'm not going to do that.* She also reflected that the pandemic would change that idea permanently, allowing more people to say no. She said the *sociologist* in her cannot wait to read about how the pandemic will change *the next 20 years of our lives and probably even more.*

Reyna reflected on novels through the lens of her emotional OE. She shared preferring novels over short stories and that if she is reading a book review and it contains short stories, she will *pivot*. She reiterated, *Even some of my favorite authors, like Beautiful Ruins by Jess Walter. I love Jess Walter. And he had this book of short stories called We Live in Water, and Barack Obama chose it as one of his best books of the year it was published. And so my husband and I listened to those. They were all short stories. I didn't like it nearly as much as I liked his other work.* Furthermore, Reyna spoke about being selective in her book choices, *I'm often not drawn to controversial books, and there are some books that I will actually avoid, especially during this pandemic. I don't need to read a book about rape. I don't want to read one about child abuse. Those kinds of books are sometimes just too hard, and I'm just not going there. I*

*guess I would rather escape in a different way. I don't need to escape into like current day politics and how everybody hates each other and is nasty and sleeps around.*

Additionally, she shared that the *empathetic piece* of reading novels and the *brilliance of the writer* are intertwined. She stated, *If the author has drawn you in enough to love those characters and wonder what they would do, what they are doing, or what they want to do. That's probably why anybody who reads a series reads it. We fall in love with the people, and we really, really care about what they're going to do and what happens to them. And sometimes that's devastating, like Game of Thrones, where chances are they're going to kill them.* She suggested that prominent character deaths in novels had a *definite change* in the last ten years. She said, *You knew you were pretty safe even if they were in danger because you knew they weren't going to kill the main character or someone that you loved, and now it happens all the time.* However, this does not stop Reyna from reading a novel, but it will not deter her from finishing a series due to her reticence to abandon a book.

Reyna spoke about addressing her emotional and intellectual OE with the news. In our second interview, she shared she was *trying to make a concerted effort to get off the news bandwagon and spend more time actually reading books instead of consuming news.* Reyna shared that she does not watch much news, but she reads a lot of news locally, nationally, and internationally. She said that she had to take a break, especially from COVID-19-related issues, because of the toll it was taking on her mental health. Her husband is a doctor, and several times we discussed how the threat has not dissipated for some people.

Reyna's preferred genre, historical fiction, often feeds her intellectual OE. She frequently looked up details from books to learn more about the factual nature of the fictional account she was reading, though she admitted she does it with television shows, too. In our second interview, she shared that *in the Matrix book, I want to know more about the real person, so I'll probably go to the author's website, read about how she got into it, then go to Wikipedia and see what that has to say. Because her queen at the time was Eleanor of Aquitaine, who I've heard of, but I couldn't tell you too much more than that. So, I think that will be really interesting.* Reyna typically investigates the story after she has finished the book, because she does not want to *disturb the atmosphere* of the book. However, she will read additional information if she needs more historical knowledge about that period, but that is the only time she will examine new information while reading. Reyna spoke about doing this same thing when she read The Paris Wife. She revealed: *When I read The Paris Wife by Paula McLain, I absolutely love her writing, but I didn't like Hemingway. That was such a neat, deep dive to do because I was like, 'Oh, so I want to know more about their time in Paris and who they met.' I've always loved F. Scott Fitzgerald, so that was really interesting that they were connected. And that whole magical time in Paris where they had all these geniuses—artists of different areas coming together, inspiring each other. So that's really fun. I love doing that. I'll always try to pursue that if it sparks some interest and [try to] find out what actually happened and how much is fictionalized.*

Reyna shared that she and her husband also incorporate this philosophy when traveling. Reyna reflected, *That's also the way my husband and I travel. I think the more*

*you know about a place before you go it's far more interesting. So, we'll read about it before we go, while we're traveling, and then after we travel. That lifelong learning thing is really important to both of us. So that's nice. And my kids, honestly, I think, are incorporating that too, which is awesome.*

## **Discussion and Metacognition**

### ***Discussion***

Reyna is the only participant who actively engages in regular discussions of her books. In addition to her book club members, who come and go, she also discusses books with her husband and daughters, though it is not always a book they are reading together. In fact, Reyna lights up when she talks about recommending books to people and helping them find the right novel. She spoke fondly about selecting books with her daughters when they were in high school and reading books with them when they recommended them to her. She shared, *I always think that your understanding deepens, whether it's in a book club or in your family or just talking to a friend. I have a friend in Oregon who we always set aside time in catch-up conversations to talk about what we're reading. And she's the one who recommended Pachinko, which is a huge favorite that I loved and that I passed on to several people.* Reyna is drawn to discussions, though she does not feel it is necessary for her comprehension, but an opportunity for depth of understanding. She asserted discussions *Always give me something to think about that I didn't think about before. I love hearing what someone else really remembered or what resonated with them, or the fact that I picked this thing. And my husband didn't even notice, or vice versa.* Reyna gets a richness out of the discussion she would not have otherwise.

Reyna enjoyed discussions as an adolescent. Reyna remembered, *I loved English class always, so I'm sure that I loved the discussion and looked forward to that part of class because I just was curious about what other people thought. And it was always really cool to get an insight from someone that you might not have picked up on. I thrived on it, and I loved that.* As a child, she frequently read novels alone. Her sisters were much younger than her, and her mother did not read the same novels. She reflected, *I don't think I had anyone to really talk about those books on my own, but I think it felt fine. I mean, I just went on to the next book...excited for the next book.* Reyna said it would have been *fun* if her mother had read the same books as her, so they could talk about them, which she would later do with her daughters. As a lifelong reader, Reyna has a passion and love for reading and books. She considered, *Being stimulated by discussing books with others and talking about ideas with others was really the impetus for creating the book club.* She also conceded that in the 90s, book clubs were really *trendy*, and she had two children under the age of four, so she wanted to get out of the house. However, she did not want a *Drunk Mommy Club*, which has become a joke for them about other book clubs. Instead, they wanted readers who wanted to read it, were engaged with the novel, and wanted to talk about the books.

### ***Metacognition and Annotation***

Reyna often engaged in metacognition or awareness of her thought process. Through our interviews, Reyna would stop what she was saying to analyze or go down a different track of her thought processes—connecting her thoughts mid-sentence. She shared that she will sometimes reread a sentence or a paragraph. Reyna related stopping

to reread *when the writing is so beautiful...that would be one of the main reasons to just say, 'Wow, how did they say that? Or that just struck me as so gorgeous?'* And, of course, reread, read, or listen for comprehension. *'Wait, what? What's she doing now?'* *I've heard that's what people complain so much about not being able to [with audiobooks]. I don't think it's that big deal I use. I use the back button a ton. Or if I think I've missed something in a chapter, I go back and listen to the whole chapter again. But if there's just parts written beautifully, that's what I really like to reread or listen to and then transfer it to a quote book if it really, really struck a chord.*

Reyna annotated her books when she felt it was necessary, though she does not do this with all of her books. If she is reading digitally, she will highlight text and annotate it on her Kindle and shared she especially annotates nonfiction books. With her preference for Audible audiobooks, she shared that she is good about clipping the text. She shared, *I especially try to not ignore the fact that if there's a really beautiful quote or something I want to go back to, I take the time to clip it.* She often takes notes when she clips the section of the book. She also shared that she does keep quote books, *so there are quotes that I'll keep that fragment and then go back to later and write them in the book. Not frequently, but yes, when something's really profound, I'll stick it in the clip and make a little note and then stick it in the quote book later.*

### **Brief Analysis of Reyna**

Reyna read as a form of appreciation—in the delight and love of literature. If a novel is particularly significant to Reyna, she will purchase it in multiple formats, and it becomes a treasured object. Reyna used stories to explore the world and have experiences

that would otherwise be impossible. She is passionate about books and wants to help people access the precise book for them, which is made more accessible by her uncanny memory. Reyna is the only participant who relished and engaged in the discussion of novels; she felt that it enhanced her understanding because of the insights of varied perspectives. Reyna sought optimistic books to help her navigate a chaotic world. Reyna met her intellectual curiosities through well-researched novels of the past and visualized the story so well that she was fully immersed in the world. Reyna engaged in metacognition throughout her entire reading process: from book selection to completion.



## **Chapter Seven: Discussion, Implications, and Areas of Future Research**

As the portraitist, I attempted to pursue complex truths by looking for good and illuminating the goodness in the portraits presented (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The voice of the portraitist and the subject should have met in the middle, causing an interaction throughout the narrative. This *duet* is displayed in my interpretations of the data through our interviews and interactions over the course of 18 months. This duet was all-encompassing from our conversations about books, giftedness, reading experiences, stories we shared with each other, and decisions made on what to include and exclude from the portraits. Without this shared experience, the portraits would not have been possible. The most tangible evidence of our duet is my interpretation of reading forms for each participant. The words chosen to describe the *resonant refrain* for each participant were considered and evaluated for months. They are a compilation of what is seen in portraits and unseen from the interviews and excluded information. Though I admit this is a glimpse of each person as a reader, and not entirely indicative of their whole life as a reader, but based on our conversations, I feel it is the most apt word I can use for each person.

The final voice is that of the reader, who interacts with both the portraitist and the participants drawing their interpretations and findings in addition to the ones explicitly stated (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). Life stories are packed with emotional content and context with different feelings and ideas; I aimed to include

this emotional content and context with different feelings and ideas; I aimed to include this complexity. I feel lucky to have reciprocity through vivid and authentic interactions between the participants and me. There were outliers, or “the deviant voice” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997, p. 193); however, those are important in qualitative research to help provide alternative perspectives.

Participants reviewed their portraits, which provided a place to report transformations in self-understanding since the portrait did not read as if they had written it but instead revealed who they were. The final interviews, where six of the seven took place one year after the second interview, were joyful experiences for both of us. It provided an opportunity for reconnection and continued understanding. All participants reported that their portraits were accurate, detailed, and insightful. James said his portrait “brought me to tears in certain places.” Ariel responded to her portrait: “It’s like looking in a mirror at myself. It was beautiful.” Finally, Marie exclaimed: “It’s me! I had to keep checking to make sure you didn’t use my name because I felt so seen.”

In some cases, portraits shed light on what subjects are unaware of themselves (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997). In many cases, the participants acknowledged that the connections drawn were accurate. For example, Pikel shared that it all felt accurate but that he felt conflicted. While he struggles with anger and reads for rebellion, he also thinks that that is not how he sees himself, echoing the idea of diminishing self-worth as seen in the portraits of James, Damia, and Pikel. Additionally, Reyna spoke about drawing a connection between her mother and their tumultuous relationship to that of her meaningful book, one that she was not aware of before our

conversations but fully admitted she had probably just “blocked.” James related the connection to his meaningful book and the trauma of his family dynamics as shaping why the novel was such a foundational read for him, something he had never processed until our conversations.

The portraits of gifted adult readers reveal similarities between how each adult engaged with literature over their lifespan. There is an interconnectedness in the use of bibliotherapy among all participants. Using the bibliotherapeutic process as the conceptual framework allowed for an interplay between bibliotherapy and how the readers engaged with the text. Many quotations could have been used in multiple sections, but I incorporated those items in certain areas to provide an interpretation using my intersectionality as a researcher and gifted reader. The research was rewarding as it allowed an opportunity for empathy and revelations for both of us.

These portraits address an understudied phenomenon, which is the use of self-determining bibliotherapy, a new term. Since adapting developmental bibliotherapy from a clinical background, scholars have maintained that guided discussion is integral to bibliotherapy (Brown, 1975; Hoagland, 1972; Moses & Zaccaria, 1969; Rubin, 1978; Zaccaria & Moses, 1968). I argue that gifted individuals engage in self-determining bibliotherapy to meet their socioemotional needs by engaging in bibliotherapy whenever they read, whether they have a formal discussion or not. This is achieved using metacognition and applying the bibliotherapeutic process whenever reading. None of the participants ever spoke of passive reading. On the contrary, every story they related about reading showed active interaction with the book, both in the moment and beyond,

sometimes even decades later. This interaction may sometimes be covert and other times overt.

Self-determining bibliotherapy requires us to reimagine the current definitions for discussion. Discussion no longer needs to take the form of face-to-face conversations. Instead, discussion should include internal conversations by the reader as they engage in metacognition in the moment and over time, questioning the actions of characters and authors. It can also involve annotations, both by the reader and others, in the moment and over time as they refer to their previous reading of a novel or engage in reading a book annotated by another person. It may also include a three-way conversation with the author, reader, and narrator of audiobooks, as their vocal intonations help shape a listener's understanding of an audiobook. Finally, discussion may take place over long lapses of time. In this research, this occurred when participants were eager to share new thoughts about books between interviews about new readings and books we had previously spoken about.

### **Research Questions**

The primary question was: How do gifted adults use bibliotherapy? The sub questions included:

1. How do gifted adults perceive bibliotherapy as a mechanism to address affective needs?
2. How do gifted adults perceive their use of bibliotherapy as children and/or adolescents?
3. How does the use of bibliotherapy change from youth to adulthood?

4. How do gifted adults utilize metacognition in the bibliotherapeutic process?

### **Bibliotherapy and Reading Patterns**

Applying Lenkowsky's (1987) definition of bibliotherapy, wherein reading is used to induce affective change, personal growth, and development, each participant has engaged in bibliotherapy throughout their lifespan. As children, each participant spoke about reading as a form of escape, and for all of them, this type of reading continues to this day, though with a broader context. As children, they read to escape the turbulence of their young, gifted lives both psychologically and emotionally. For example, Ariel spoke about reading to help her understand her peers and to protect herself emotionally. Rachel also used novels to help her stand up to bullies, though she did the opposite of the character. James and Reyna turned to books to escape family trauma.

All participants spoke about reading early and being able to read when they entered kindergarten. However, James, Marie, and Ariel are the only three who explicitly spoke about their family reading, as well. As adults with their children, all participants, except Damia, who does not have children, acknowledged prioritizing family reading time and allowing time to engage with their children about books. Each participant recalled their earliest reading as series reading (i.e., books that belong to the same collection but can be read in any order) or serial reading (i.e., books that must be read in a specific order to follow a plot). This type of reading allowed them to delve deep into a familiar world that resonated with them. However, James is the only participant who only recalled reading one series in his early childhood; all others were vast consumers of

multiple series or serial novels. Interestingly, Damia, Marie, and Reyna read the same books, though Damia is in her 30s and the other two women are in their 50s. Damia spoke about feeling more connected with the generation of her parents or grandparents based on her childhood reading choices.

There was some variance among participants regarding reading as collectivism and completism. Reyna, Damia, Ariel, and Rachel all spoke about having collectivism. Rachel admitted that she is buying a complete set of the Nancy Drew series whenever one is available. Damia admitted to buying untouched boxed sets of books from her childhood. Reyna often purchases books that “touch her soul” to have a tangible copy if she initially purchased them as audiobooks. Each participant did speak about completism and finishing series once they were started, though with varying successes. All of them are primarily completed series books, with few exceptions. Regarding serial reading, Damia, Reyna, and Rachel all read every Nancy Drew book published. As did Pikel with The Hardy Boys series. Damia and Rachel have also used lists to help facilitate their reading; Damia used lists in her youth, whereas Rachel relied upon them in adulthood. Though it is not a list, Reyna does consult several sources when deciding what book she should read next as her book club read. Rachel is the only participant actively keeping track of her books in adulthood. She shared in our final interview that in 2022, “I got a book to keep track in August 2021, so 2022 was the first year I could track everything I read. I read 92 books—61 for me and 31 that I read with or for the kids.” Conversely, Reyna’s joy comes from reading, not quantifying her reading with numbers and lists, so she doesn’t keep track, though estimated she reads an average of four books a month.

Each participant shared stories of immersing themselves in their books' worlds, often losing track of time. All participants have vivid imaginations and spoke about visualizing the book in their minds. This transportation through imagination may have helped them better engage with bibliotherapy since they can become swept away in the story being told. Several participants shared that when they were interrupted from reading, it took a while to leave the world they had been inhabiting to return to reality. Along the same vein, both Damia and Pikel discussed the power of cover art on books. Pikel related that cover art could help him determine if he will read a book—often “literally choosing a book by it’s cover.” Whereas Damia said that she did not initially read her meaningful book, A Wrinkle in Time because the cover had a “scary head with red eyes.” Only after the cover art changed, she picked up a story that would be integral to her life.

Participants also spoke about the evolution of their preference for fiction and nonfiction. All of the participants engaged with fiction as the primary source of knowledge as children. All participants continue to read fiction as adults, though the percentage of fiction in their yearly reading varies by person. Both male participants indicated a predilection toward engaging with nonfiction in their early childhood and using how-to books to master new content and information. However, all participants read nonfiction in their adulthood, while most of them avoided it in childhood and adolescence. James has intermixed fiction and nonfiction, with a preference toward nonfiction at an earlier age than any other participant; many of the novels he referenced were nonfiction, as he often used nonfiction to better understand himself by seeing how

others responded in similar situations. James was the only participant to share this sentiment. Marie and Rachel use nonfiction as adults to help address needs that arise. Reyna and Pikel read nonfiction to provide insight into lived experiences they would not otherwise know.

Each person related stories of perusing library stacks or asking librarians for help selecting their novels early in life. However, James related a concerning story that at age eight, when he was told by a librarian to leave the adult nonfiction books because “they’re not for you—your books are downstairs.” James recalled that even in his 50s, he could still remember the shame he felt in the moment during his childhood after that encounter; however, he would not be deterred, and eventually, he would go on to “read every book in the 689.892 section” of the Dewey Decimal, checking out a few multiple times. The fact that James could vividly recall the library section from his childhood speaks to the importance of available book options.

At some point, all participants, excluding Ariel and Rachel, began reading controversial books. Marie had access to controversial books from a very young age. She spoke about her mother, a librarian with a master’s degree in the 1970s, ensuring no book was off-limits. However, as an adult, she wondered if she should have had access to some of them so young, specifically Hieronymus Bosch. Some novels, such as Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret. were controversial. Others were controversial due to family values, as James and Damia shared stories where their conservative upbringing hindered book choices, though both read them anyway.



For different reasons, Marie, Rachel, and Pikel gravitated toward novels where animals were primary characters. Marie, who grew up on a farm, reflected that through books: “I realized humans aren’t the only ones who can think. There is a horror in the way humans treat animals.” Marie related that the personification of animals profoundly impacted her, as she related to Alexander the alligator, who just was misunderstood, which is how she felt often. Rachel’s two examples of catharsis involved animals, declaring, “You don’t want to treat animals badly, or something happens, if they die or get hurt, it is upsetting to me.” Finally, Pikel is drawn to animals in storylines, often feeling more empathy for them than their human counterparts. He is especially drawn to books where, “animals that could interact with humans.” This is why the movie adaption of Congo was so difficult for him—they took away the magic of the gorilla speaking sign language.

Every participant grew up reading paper novels, as digital books have only been around since the late 1990s, and the first Kindle was released in 2007. All participants except Rachel regularly engage with audiobooks; Rachel had only listened to one audiobook but had plans to try it again. Each participant shared that the ability to multitask while reading helped address their intellectual need for stimulation, but audiobooks allowed them to address the duties of adulthood. Damia’s assertion best summarizes this: “Audiobooks are less greedy of my senses.” Reyna reflected that sometimes the audiobook narrator can improve or ruin the experiences, relating that Jim Dale read the Harry Potter series better than she ever could; Ariel shared the same sentiment about Dale’s rendition of the series. Still, Reyna recently had to abandon an

audiobook based on the narrator and read it solely on paper. Ariel and Reyna spoke about treasuring copies of their books and having the same novel in multiple formats. Damia preferred maintaining an extensive Kindle collection, as it was easier for her to search for information and always to have content readily available on the app.

At some point in their life, all participants have reread at least one novel. Reyna, Pikel, and James reread the least frequently, as there are too many unread books. James read his meaningful book at least ten times and several other books twice. Pikel has only reread two books, Jurassic Park and Congo. Reyna has a very strong memory, so she only rereads unique books for specific reasons. Conversely, Ariel prefers rereading and does this the majority of the time, though it is to address the emotional pull that novels have on her. In our final interview, she was re-reading Persuasion. Rachel will occasionally reread a book from her childhood if she feels nostalgic and wants an easy read. Regardless, all participants spoke of acquiring new insight after each read of the book and having an opportunity to find more nuances.

All participants mentioned some form of “rabbit hole reading” wherein they would read something that would lead them to something else. As children, this often occurred when they would read a series or all of the books by a particular author. In adulthood, this occurred through researching topics in the books they read. Reyna and James spoke about using Wikipedia to learn more information when necessary about a topic. Reyna and Pikel shared that they start with an author’s website to garner more information. Ariel related as a child that, she would read every book about the author that was published. Regardless of how they got additional information, all participants echoed

Rachel's sentiment: "I feel surprised when I look back to where I started and where I ended up after exploring topics that arose while reading." This form of rabbit hole reading meets the intellectual curiosity of all participants and their intellectual OE.

### **Bibliotherapy and Affective Needs**

The gifted adult readers have read to meet their socioemotional needs and address their life's nuances. All participants spoke about using books to help them search for their identities. They all read books about gifted characters in their childhood and adolescence, often searching for elements from the fictional characters that they could apply to their lives. This is unsurprising given that only Ariel, Pikel, James, and Reyna were officially identified as gifted and provided a different curriculum in their early childhood. Damia, Rachel, and Marie echoed feelings of being different and finishing work before others, but they did not recall gifted identification or curriculum changes being an option in their schools. In April 2023, Marie realized she was searching for her identity in books but could not find it. Many of the books she read were part of the whitestream (Grande, 2003), and very few books had a main character of color. Instead, she gained identification through books about animals since she grew up on a farm. She related: "My mind is blown. I just never realized this, but now I realize it is so true. There were very few books with diverse persons."

Each of the participants spoke about feeling misunderstood, lonely, or isolated. This was especially pronounced with Pikel and James, the male participants, who have felt isolated their whole lives. This is not surprising given the fact that society generally is accepting of gifted girls in their youth but not of gifted boys, sometimes calling extra

attention on them, as in the case of James, or failing to meet their needs, as in the case of Pikel (Galbraith & Delisle, 2015). Both men spoke of finding peer groups in college, which helped alleviate feelings of loneliness that plagued them in their childhood and adolescence. It may be important to note that Szymanski and Wren (2019) assert that the cycle of frustration, isolation, and negative feelings is positive in the Theory of Positive Disintegration, as it is needed to allow a person to get to a higher level of integration. In addition, Dabrowski (1972) noted that inner conflict could help propel people to higher personality development. So, it is not as surprising that all of the participants reported feelings of loneliness and isolation.

At some point, all participants reported a feeling of imposter syndrome, though many were still dealing with it in adulthood. Damia spoke of doubting her intelligence, despite being content accelerated in elementary and joining MENSA. James, who had a perfect ACT and got into a prestigious engineering school, often relates that he is not good at his job, despite having a patent and being headhunted for a new position. Ariel spoke about imposter syndrome in her personal and professional life. Though all three participants are resilient, the nagging worry that they are insufficient is persistent.

Finally, Marie, James, Rachel, and Damia listen to podcasts to acquire new information. Podcasts allow for the microconsumption of information, meeting their intellectual need for knowledge but knowing exactly how much time they must invest. Their reliance on podcasts could also be related to the fact that once the podcast is over, they are done. Whereas with a novel, the reader must orient themselves again each time

they begin reading. Podcasts fill the need for storytelling, but in short spurts, leaving more time open.

### **Bibliotherapy and Metacognition and Annotation**

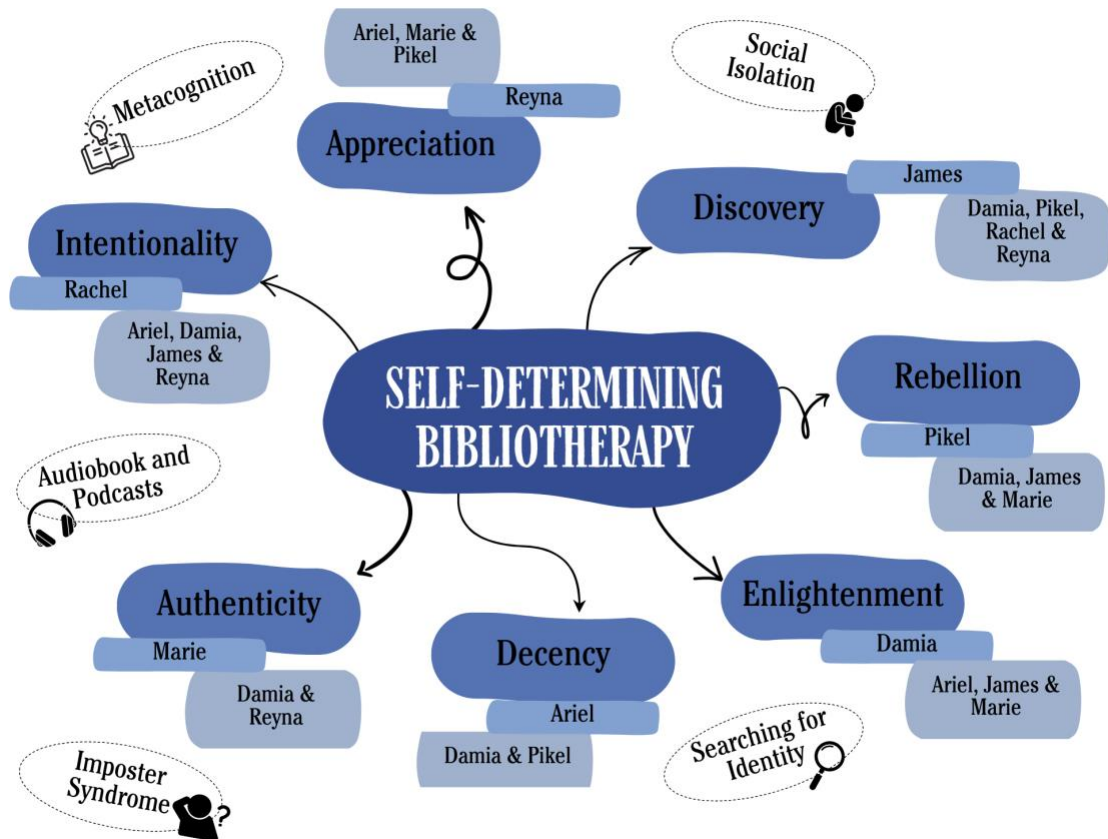
The only participant who actively engages in discussion regularly is Reyna, who created a book club that has lasted for 24 years. All of the other participants rely on metacognition as their form of discussion. Each person spoke about thinking about their books both in the moment and well beyond. This form of metacognition meets the intellectual stimulation of discussion but can be done within their head. The other form of metacognition that all participants engage with is annotation. Reyna and Rachel keep physical copies of notes and important quotes from novels. Reyna clips sections of her audiobooks and adds comments and thoughts. Damia annotates both physical and digital copies of books making notations. Ariel, Marie, Pikel, and James annotate in their books' margins. Marie reflected that when she returned to a book after a year, she appreciated her annotations because they helped reinforce and inform her thinking and allowed her to reflect on what had changed.

### **Overlapping Forms of Reading**

Each participant had a resonant refrain that became their form of reading. These refrains overlap among participants. The form included participant reflection on bibliotherapy through their lifespan. While I have selected one word to describe it, a different series of questions and conversations might create an alternative representation of their engagement with literature. See Figure 3 for a visual representation of the findings.

**Figure 3**

*Visual Representation of Themes*



Damia reads as a form of enlightenment, using books to learn new information and explore new places. As a child, Damia relied on fiction, but as an adult she gravitates toward nonfiction to address enlightenment by gaining knowledge to better understand herself, others, and the world. James, Marie, and Ariel also read for enlightenment. All four of them are actively searching for life's answers. Marie primarily gravitates toward books about mysticism.

Ariel reads as a form of decency. She searches for positivity and happiness in books, where good triumphs over evil. This is probably the fundamental reason why she

also chooses to reread novels rather than engage in new ones—she already knows it will end well, and the victor is deserving. Damia, Rachel, and Pikel have also read for this purpose over their lifespan. Pikel specifically searches for decency in how animals are treated, and Damia searches for utopia. Rachel and Damia both sought out moments of utopia instead of dystopia.

Rachel reads as a form of intentionality. She consults lists to determine book choices and requires herself to read various genres. She is searching for answers in the books she reads. James, Reyna, Ariel, and Damia are readers with intentionality. They all applied lessons from novels to address specific interactions in their lives at some point. James used books to help him understand that engineers could be kind and helpful. Damia used an article to understand the nuances of her giftedness better, finally feeling not so alone for the first time in her life. Ariel spoke of using books to help her address the issues of school life.

Pikel reads as a form of rebellion, often reading books he thinks he should not. Pikel's book choices have been specifically selected to be the opposite of what was expected. Even his choice to read adult books in middle school reflects a different form of rebellion. James, Damia, and Marie also read books as a form of rebellion. Marie has read rebelliously her entire life as she read banned books. Both Damia and James read books against their religious upbringing; Damia read her books secretly, and James read his books openly.

Marie reads as a form of authenticity, searching for the truth unseen. This is probably why she gravitates toward mysticism and didactic literature—she is hunting for

authentic lived experiences and applications. Marie seeks authentic interactions and responses—from her love of Vonnegut to her connection to a smiling alligator. Reyna and Damia also read for authenticity. Reyna reads historical fiction in hopes of learning more. Both Reyna and Damia have read to experience what life would be like in a different time or place. Marie and Damia, both women of color, spoke of searching for authentic voices in diverse literature.

James reads as a form of discovery, searching for knowledge and understanding to meet his inquisitive nature. James has used nonfiction throughout his life to learn and inform his interactions with others. James has gravitated toward STEM books his entire life, thus addressing his multipotentiality and helping him determine his future career. Pikel, Damia, Reyna, and Rachel also read as a form of discovery. Pikel watches movie adaptations before reading the novel so he is not disappointed, or he skips the novels altogether. Rachel relies on nonfiction to help find answers to her obligations. Damia and Reyna read to explore new eras and experiences.

Reyna reads as a form of appreciation. The novels she selects are cultivated from research on books, and she savors the beauty of the written word. Novels are treasured items for her, and she finds great pleasure in helping others find books. She appreciates the wonder of stories and has her whole life. Pikel, Ariel, and Marie also read as a form of appreciation. Ariel spoke about using books as inspiration for what characters say and do in the moment and how she could apply that to her own life.

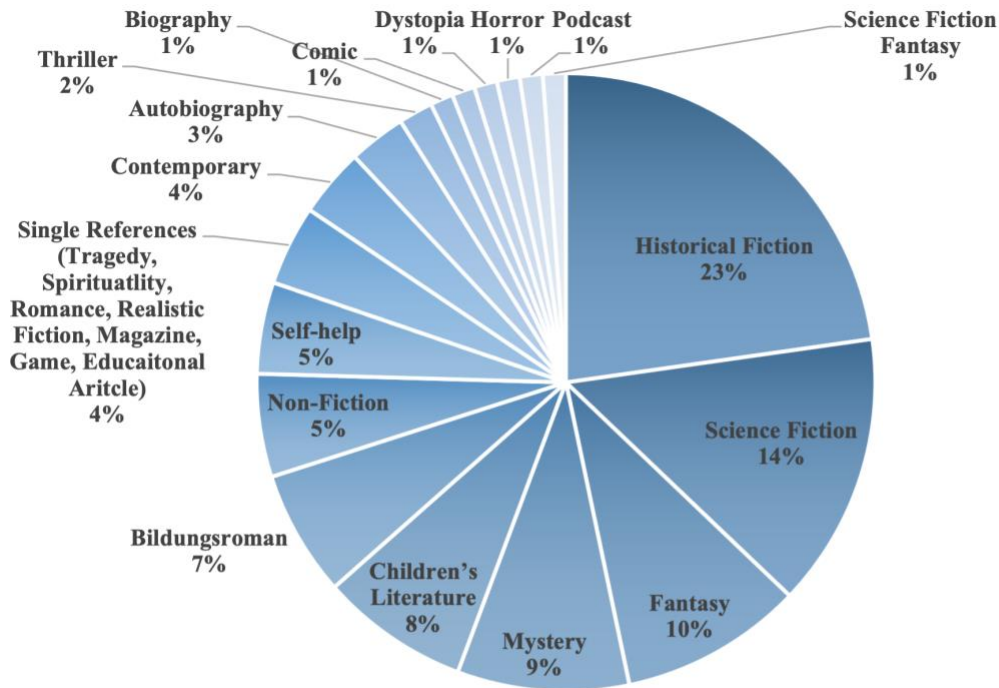


## Implications

There are two lasting implications for this study. The first is ensuring exposure to different genres at a young age. The genre of preference in childhood remains the same in adulthood for all seven participants. While their selection may be the same, many break out of this genre in adulthood, specifically by reading nonfiction. Figure 4 outlines the percentage of books for all participants from portraits by genre. Finally, Figure 5 illustrates the texts referenced by participants, which date over the past 210 years; though this list is not indicative of all of the novels read, it is of the texts referenced in individual portraits.

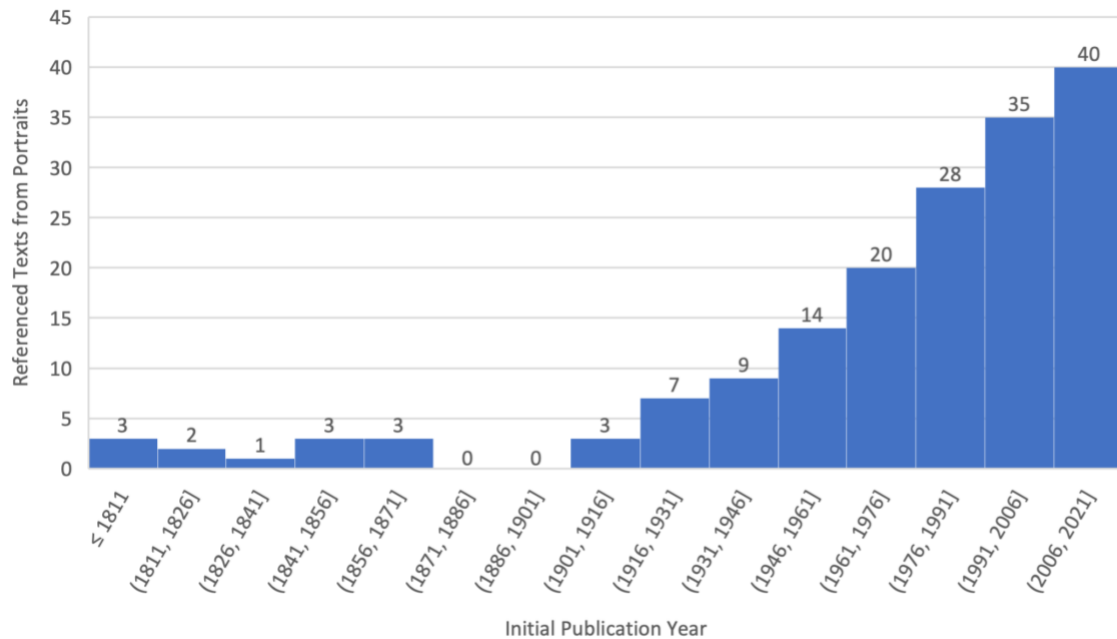
**Figure 4**

*Participant Novel Genres*



**Figure 5**

*Participant Novel Initial Year of Publication*



*Note.* This figure contains 17 duplicate book entries from overlapping reads by participants.

Secondly, the lasting impact of whitestream and diversity in books is essential. Marie and Damia, both women of color, spoke about the lack of diversity in their reading options. Damia divulged that her book choices in childhood created a “Eurocentric” and “white-American core” inside her. During our final interview and portrait review, Marie felt that she wanted to remove the qualifier in one of her statements, “little black boy,” because it did not feel right. I suggested that she probably said it in our interview because it was lacking in her childhood without even realizing it. Marie immediately gushed, “Yes! That’s it. Oh my gosh...I never even realized that until right this moment.” Eventually, we added to her quotation, allowing her to have some of that revelation

within the portrait: *“I remember the boy was very poor, and he was a little black boy—he was a person of color—and that struck a chord with me. Very few, if any, books that I read as a child had a main character as a person of color.”*

Damia also had a similar reaction when reflecting on her book options. In our final interview, she shared: “It’s hard to find black joy and black finesse—stories that are positive. I’m not so into the portrayal of black people, black women, and the United States in the past. I don’t want to identify with someone who is struggling, impoverished, raped, or beaten. That’s not interesting to me.” The book options available to students need to reflect not only the past but also moments of joy.

### **Areas for Future Research**

Bibliotherapy is a broad topic. Several areas for future research have emerged from this research. The first is the idea of secret reading. Several participants alluded to secret reading, and one person divulged looking at sexual books at an early age, though they wished to remain unnamed and for it not to be included in their portrait. The idea of secret reading in childhood and adolescence is fascinating to see the rationale and the type of books kept secret. Furthermore, future research could be completed surrounding the overlapping of audiobooks and multitasking in adulthood. All of the participants spoke of using audiobooks when doing other tasks. It might also be interesting to explore if males or females engage in this more frequently and their rationale. Research could be conducted on using podcasts as a form of microconsuming information. This was referenced by three participants specifically as a way to meet intellectual needs within an allotted time frame. Finally, research surrounding self-determining bibliotherapy in

connection with adult development levels and adult learning theory may yield more information surrounding engagement beyond gifted persons over their lifespan.

## **Conclusion**

Gifted adults use bibliotherapy as they read across their lifespans. Both fiction and nonfiction books are used as mechanisms to address the affective needs of gifted persons across their lifespans. Gifted readers use metacognition across their lifespan to engage in the bibliotherapeutic process, often having identification, catharsis, insight, and universalization with every book. Gifted readers may covertly or overtly address their needs, sometimes returning to a book without knowing why. Gifted readers achieve universalization with most of the novels they read, finding ways to apply what they have read to their lives. As their socioemotional needs go unmet, gifted readers turn to fiction and nonfiction to address their concerns. Gifted individuals engage in self-determining bibliotherapy to meet their socioemotional needs by reading deeply and meaningfully and through the use of metacognition, which allows for explicit connection and application of reading to real life.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Partner Agreement and Roles<sup>7</sup>

### Community Partnership Roles Outlined

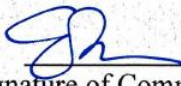
#### *The Role of the Community Partner*

- Initial outreach through introduction letter and self-inclusion for selection as a participant.
  - This may be forwarded to additional potential participants.
  - Communication of the introduction letter will be done through email.

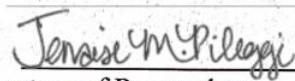
#### *The Role of the Researcher*

- Select diverse participants from pool, if possible.
  - To make the study more generalizable, participants would be:  
men and women, various age groups, race/ethnicity, officially- or self- identified  
gifted, different community locations, different highest level of education.
  - Initial communication between researcher and potential participants will be done  
through e-mails.
- Provide informed consent prior to first interview.
- Interview participants using protocols. The researcher will:
  - Record, transcribe, code results.
  - Identify themes.
  - Use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality; only the researcher will know the actual  
participant names.
  - Submit portraits to participants for review for accuracy; participants can ask for removal  
of sections of quotations or words leading up to a quotation as needed, but themes will  
not be altered.
  - Destroy Zoom recordings after final defense of Dissertation in Practice.
    - Retain transcripts indefinitely, but anonymous and de-identified.
- Present findings at conferences following successful completion of Dissertation in Practice.

I accept these roles and agree to serve as a community partner for recruitment outreach for Jervaise Pileggi, doctoral student at the University of Denver with clinical professor, Dr. Norma Hafenstein.

 Elizabeth Busler, Secretary PPAGS  
Signature of Community Partner                      Printed Name

7/13/2021  
Date

 07/14/2021  
Signature of Researcher                      Date

<sup>7</sup> This dissertation was initially started as part of an EdD program, wherein a community partner is procured. The original paperwork signed by the recruitment partner still includes this verbiage.



## Appendix B: IRB Determination



DATE: August 25, 2021

TO: Jervaise Pileggi, BA, M.Ed.  
FROM: University of Denver (DU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1798737-1] Bibliotherapy as a means to Address Affective Needs  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: **EXEMPTION GRANTED**  
DECISION DATE: August 25, 2021  
NEXT REPORT DUE: *August 25, 2022*  
RISK LEVEL: Minimal Risk

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

### **Exemption 2: Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews, or Observations**

Thank you for your submission of Exemption Request materials for this project. The University of Denver IRB has determined this project is **EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW** according to federal regulations. This exemption was granted based on appropriate criteria for granting an exemption and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized.

Please note that maintaining exempt status requires that (a) risks of the study remain minimal; (b) that anonymity or confidentiality of participants, or protection of participants against any increased risk due to the internal knowledge or disclosure of identity by the researcher, is maintained as described in the application; (c) that no deception is introduced, such as reducing the accuracy or specificity of information about the research protocol that is given to prospective participants; (d) the research purpose, sponsor, and recruited study population remain as described; and (e) the principal investigator (PI) continues and is not replaced.

If changes occur in any of the features of the study as described, this may affect one or more of the conditions of exemption and may warrant a reclassification of the research protocol from exempt and require additional IRB review. For the duration of your research study, any changes in the proposed study must be reviewed by the University of Denver IRB before implementation of those changes.

### **Informed Consent Process**

Informed consent is an important process when conducting human subject research beginning with providing potential subjects with a description of the project and assurance of a participants understanding. The DU IRB has granted this project exempt status with the use of an Exempt Information Letter. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via the use of the approved Exempt Information Letter. If requested, each participant is entitled to receive a copy of the Exempt Information Letter.

### **Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others (UPIRTSOs)**

Any incident, experience or outcome which has been associated with an unexpected event(s), related or possibly related to participation in the research, and suggests that the research places subjects or

others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or suspected must be reported to the IRB. UPIRTSOs may or may not require suspension of the research. Each incident is evaluated on a case by case basis to make this determination. The IRB may require remedial action or education as deemed necessary for the investigator or any other key personnel. The investigator is responsible for reporting UPIRTSOs to the IRB within 5 working days after becoming aware of the unexpected event. Use the Reportable New Information (RNI) form within the IRBNet system to report any UPIRTSOs. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported.

#### **Continuation Review Requirements**

Based on the current regulatory requirements, this exempt project does **not** require continuing review. However, this project has been assigned a **one-year review period** requiring communication to the IRB at the end of this review period to either close the study or request an extension for another year. The one-year review period will be posted in the Next Report Due section on the Submission Details page in IRBNet. During this one-year period, a staff member from the Office of Research Integrity and Education (ORIE) may also conduct a Post Approval Monitoring visit to evaluate the progress of this research project.

#### **Study Completion and Final Report**

A Final Report must be submitted to the IRB, via the IRBNet system, when this study has been completed. The DU HRPP/IRB will retain a copy of the project document within our records for three years after the closure of the study. The Principal Investigator is also responsible for retaining all study documents associated with this study for at least three years after the project is completed.

**PLEASE NOTE: This project will be administratively closed at the end of a one-year period unless a request is received from the Principal Investigator to extend the project.** Please contact the DU HRPP/IRB if the study is completed before the one-year time period or if you are no longer affiliated with the University of Denver through submitting a Final Report to the DU IRB via the IRBNet system. If you are no longer affiliated with DU and wish to transfer your project to another institution please contact the DU IRB for assistance.

If you have any questions, please contact the DU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (303) 871-2121 or at [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu). Please include your project title and IRBNet number in all correspondence with the IRB.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Denver (DU) IRB's records.

## Appendix C: Introduction to Study

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Jervaise Pileggi, and I am a student from the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver. For my doctoral Dissertation in Practice, I am conducting research on gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is the practice of using books to affect change in your life (this does not necessarily mean the use of self-help books).

I am requesting participants who identify as gifted adults (either formally identified or self-identified) who read literature to better understand themselves and the world around them to participate in research. Participants should read and engage with literature frequently.

Time Commitment:

- Two, (1) hour for one interview.
- Thirty (30) minutes to one (1 hour) for review of findings and follow-up discussion.

Protection and Confidentiality:

- All participants will be given a pseudonym in the research, and only the researcher will know who each person is. The only data will be your age bracket (20s, 40s, 60s, etc.), your ethnicity, and your highest level of education; these are only shared to show that there was a diverse population of participants.
- You will have an opportunity to review your portrait to ensure it is accurate.
- All questions are voluntary and you are not required to answer or share anything you are uncomfortable with.
- All conversations will be recorded on Zoom and then destroyed after successful defense of the Dissertation in Practice. The transcribed, de-identified data, only using the pseudonym will be kept of file for potential future research.

There is a gap in the field of gifted education surrounding the use of bibliotherapy with gifted adults, and this research hopes to address that gap.

This is completely voluntary. If you would like to be consider for inclusion, please contact me at [Jervaise.Pileggi@du.edu](mailto:Jervaise.Pileggi@du.edu). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Norma Lu Hafenstein at [Norma.Hafenstein@du.edu](mailto:Norma.Hafenstein@du.edu). If interested, please include in your email your name, age bracket (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s), and your highest level of education. You will be contacted by email if selected to participate.

You may also forward this invitation to someone you think could be a potential participant.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jervaise Pileggi

## **Appendix D: Communication with Participant Pool**

### ***Initial Response following Potential Participant Email***

Thank you so much for your interest in my study. You have been selected to participate. Please review the attached Consent Form. Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.

Our first two interviews will be conducted between November 2021-January 2022, depending on your availability.

If you choose to be a participant, please share the following demographic data. If you do not wish to share any of these criteria, please let me know in your response.

- Will you please respond with your gender?
- Will you please respond with your age bracket (20s, 40s, 60s, etc.)?
- Will you please respond with your ethnicity?
- Will you please respond with your highest level of education?
- Will you please respond if you were formally or informally identified as gifted? Formal includes identified while in K-12 schooling, informally includes any other way (reading about giftedness and recognizing your own traits, conversations with peers/educators/colleagues, etc.).

Thank you again for your interest in this topic and my research.

I look forward to your response and our initial interview,

Jervaise Pileggi, M.Ed.  
2022 Ed.D. Curriculum and Instruction Gifted Education  
Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

### ***Response for Participant Selection***

Thank you so much for your interest in my study.

Please respond with some dates and times that work for you for our initial interview. All follow-up interviews will be scheduled at the conclusion of the previous interview.

Thank you again. I will be in touch soon,

Jervaise Pileggi, M.Ed.  
2022 Ed.D. Curriculum and Instruction Gifted Education

Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

## Appendix E: Informed Consent



Consent Version: 08/10/2021

### Exempt Research Information Sheet

**Title of Research Study:** Bibliotherapy as a means to Address Affective Needs

**Principal Investigator:** **Jervaise M. Pileggi**, M.Ed., Doctoral Student, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education

**Faculty Sponsor:** **Norma Lu Hafenstein**, PhD, Daniel L. Ritchie Endowed Chair in Gifted Education, Clinical Professor, University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education

**IRBNet Protocol #:** 1798737-1

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

#### **Study Purpose:**

If you participate in this research study, you will be invited to participate in three different interviews about your own perceptions of bibliotherapy.

The purpose of this study is to examine gifted adults' self-perceptions of bibliotherapy. This will be done through exploring how gifted adults engage with literature, as well as their reflections on how they used literature as children and/or adolescents. The researcher will determine if gifted adult readers used bibliotherapy as a way of meeting their affective needs. When readers engage with literature, they can progress through the bibliotherapeutic process: identification, catharsis, insight, and universalization. Readers working through the bibliotherapeutic process may not experience all four elements with any given piece of literature. The researcher hopes to determine if gifted readers use metacognition (understanding one's own thought processes) in lieu of discussion with others.

You may choose not to answer any question or participate in an interview or withdraw from the study for any reason without penalty.

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study.

You will not benefit directly from participating in this study.

Your interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Instead of your name, a pseudonym will be used to protect confidentiality; only the researcher will know the actual participant names. An individual "portrait" for you will be created by the researcher. You will be able to review this portrait for accuracy; participants can ask for removal of sections of quotations or words leading up to a quotation as needed, but themes will not be altered. The researcher will destroy Zoom recordings after final defense of Dissertation in Practice, but will retain transcripts indefinitely, both anonymous and de-identified. Words, phrases or any element of these transcripts may be used for future research; this serves as current and future consent.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be a part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in three interviews. The first and second interview will be asking questions related to research questions. There will be a semi-structured interview protocol in place. The third interview is a follow-up and will be after you have had an opportunity to review your individual portraits. The first two interviews will be approximately

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Exempt Information Letter, v2, May 2019

one (1) hour. The third interview will be thirty (30) minutes to one (1 hour) for review of individual portrait and follow-up discussion.

You will be audio and video recorded during all three interviews, so that they can be transcribed. The dates of each interview will be arranged privately between you and the researcher.

**Data Sharing**

De-identified data from this study may be shared with the research community at large to advance gifted education at all ages. We will remove or code any personal information that could identify you and no one will be able to identify you from the information we share. Despite these measures, we cannot guarantee anonymity of your personal data.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about this project or your participation, please feel free to ask questions now or contact Jervaise Pileggi at [Jervaise.Pileggi@du.edu](mailto:Jervaise.Pileggi@du.edu) at any time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your research participation or rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Denver's Human Research Protections Program (HRPP) by emailing [IRBAdmin@du.edu](mailto:IRBAdmin@du.edu) or calling (303) 871-2121 to speak to someone other than the researchers.

The University of Denver Institutional Review Board has determined that this study is minimal risk and is exempt from full IRB oversight.

**Please take all the time you need to read through this document and decide whether you would like to participate in this research study.**

**If you decide to participate, your completion of the research procedures indicates your consent. Please keep this form for your records.**



## Appendix F: Interview One Protocols

### *Interview One Protocol*

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Supporting Literature</i>
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Hello. As a reminder, participation in this interview is voluntary. My name is Jervaise Pileggi. You were selected to participate because you have indicated that you are gifted and that you use bibliotherapy. I am conducting this research as part of my Dissertation in Practice for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Denver. The findings will be shared with my dissertation committee and published. Your name will not be used and a pseudonym will be used instead. No defining characteristics of you will be shared beyond your ethnicity, age range (30s, 40s, etc.), and your level of highest education. You will have an opportunity to review my “portrait” of you to check for accuracy and to ensure that there is no potential harm in what I am including.</p> <p>Have you reviewed the informed consent? Do you have any questions? Do you verbally agree to participate in this study?</p> <p>This interview will be structured as more of a conversation, I have a 13 specific questions for you, but may also ask you follow-up questions. Remember, this is completely voluntary and if you do not feel comfortable answering a question, it is okay to skip it. You may stop this interview at any time. This interview will take approximately one hour.</p> <p>A little about me: I am student at the University of Denver and have a bachelor’s degree in English. I have loved reading my whole life, and have often used literature in many forms. I am interested in seeing how other readers interact with literature as a means of solving problems, which is what bibliotherapy is. Another word you will need to understand is affective, which is defined as your social and emotional needs. Do you have any questions? Please let me know what pseudonym you would like me to use in my work.</p>	<p>Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Billups (2021) encourage an introduction with definitions and expectations.</p>
<p><i>Opening Question</i></p> <p>1. Can you tell me about yourself?</p>	<p>Creswell and Creswell (2018) encourage an opening question to</p>

	allow the interviewee to open up to the discussion.
2. How would you describe yourself as reader?	Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) question to set the context.
<i>Content Questions</i>	
3. Where do you read and how often do you read for pleasure? Probe	Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) question to set the context.
4. Tell me about a book you recently read. Probe: Did anything resonate with you? Have you recommended it to others? Fiction? Non-fiction?	Creswell and Creswell (2018) encourage an opening question to allow the interviewee to open up to the discussion.
5. What are some of your favorite books? Probe: How many times have you read them? When was the first time you read it? Fiction? Non-fiction?	Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) question to set the context.
6. How do you define or describe bibliotherapy? Probe	Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) question to set the context.
7. As an adult, why do you read? Probe: Do you read books that you are interested in learning about? Is it to escape? To learn about yourself?	Halstead (2009) discusses that some adult gifted readers read to address their multipotentiality.
8. Do you find yourself gravitating toward certain themes or genres of novels at any time? Probe: Why do you think you gravitate toward them? What about in your youth? What about in your adolescence?	Gender preferences in youth (Hébert et al., 2001; Hébert, 2009; Halstead, 2009; Langerman, 1990)
9. Do you frequently identify with characters in books? Probe: Can you tell me how? What about in your youth? What about in your adolescence?	The Bibliotherapeutic Process <i>identification</i> and/or <i>catharsis</i> (Halstead, 2009).

10. Have you ever used the content of a book to help you understand yourself or others?	The Bibliotherapeutic Process <i>insight</i> and/or <i>universalization</i> (Halstead, 2009). Affective needs (Adderholt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992)
Probe: Can you tell me about any particular experience you recall? What about in your youth? What about in your adolescence?	
11. Did you ever engage in a discussion with other about your book to better understand it?	Required element of discussion (Brown, 1975; Hoagland, 1972; Moses & Zaccaria 1969; Rubin, 1978; Zaccaria & Moses, 1968)
Probe: When? Did that help? How so?	
12. Did you ever use a book to help you better understand yourself or others?	Metacognition (Cheng, 1993; Davidson, 1986; Sisk, 1982)
Probe	
<hr/> 13. Do you have anything you'd like to add? <i>Closing Instructions</i> Thank the interviewee, remind them of confidentiality, determine next meeting date, discuss follow-up interview if needed. <hr/>	

## Appendix G: Interview Two Protocols

### *Interview Two Protocol*

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Supporting Literature</i>
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Hello, it’s nice to see you again. As a reminder, participation in this interview is voluntary. My name is Jervaise Pileggi. I am so glad you’ve chosen to continue to participate in my research about gifted adults and bibliotherapy. As a reminder, I am conducting this research as part of my Dissertation in Practice for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Denver. The findings will be shared with my dissertation committee and published. Your name will not be used and a pseudonym will be used instead. No defining characteristics of you will be shared beyond your ethnicity, age range (30s, 40s, etc.), and your level of highest education. You will have an opportunity to review my “portrait” of you to check for accuracy and to ensure that there is no potential harm in what I am including.</p> <p>Have you reviewed the informed consent? Do you have any questions? Do you verbally agree to participate in this study?</p> <p>This interview will be structured as more of a conversation, I have a 12 specific questions for you, but may also ask you follow-up questions. Remember, this is completely voluntary and if you do not feel comfortable answering a question, it is okay to skip it. You may stop this interview at any time. This interview will take approximately one hour.</p>	<p>Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Billups (2021) encourage an introduction with definitions and expectations.</p>
<p><i>Opening Question</i></p> <p>1. Have you read anything lately that is resonating with you? Probe</p> <p>2. Do you have anything you’d like to add from last time? Probe</p>	<p>Halstead (2009) to determine what they are reading.</p> <p>The Bibliotherapeutic Process (Halstead, 2009) and/or affective needs (Adderholt-Elliott &amp; Eller, 1989; Frasier &amp; McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992)</p>

<p>3. Have you noticed you are engaging with literature in a different way as a result of our last conversation? Probe</p>	<p>The Bibliotherapeutic Process (Halstead, 2009) and/or affective needs (Adderholt-Elliott &amp; Eller, 1989; Frasier &amp; McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992)</p>
<hr/>	
<p><i>Content Questions</i></p>	
<p>4. Probe adult reading.</p>	<p>Halstead (2009) discusses that some adult gifted readers read to address their multipotentiality.</p>
<hr/>	
<p>5. Probe themes.</p>	<p>Gender preferences in youth (Hébert et al., 2001; Hébert, 2009; Halstead, 2009; Langerman, 1990)</p>
<hr/>	
<p>6. Probe identification and/or catharsis.</p>	<p>The Bibliotherapeutic Process <i>identification</i> and/or <i>catharsis</i> (Halstead, 2009).</p>
<hr/>	
<p>7. Probe insight and/or universalization.</p>	<p>The Bibliotherapeutic Process <i>insight</i> and/or <i>universalization</i> (Halstead, 2009). Affective needs (Adderholt-Elliott &amp; Eller, 1989; Frasier &amp; McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992)</p>
<hr/>	
<p>8. Probe book preferences in youth.</p>	<p>Gender preferences in youth (Hébert et al., 2001; Hébert, 2009; Halstead, 2009; Langerman, 1990)</p>
<hr/>	
<p>9. Probe connections to bibliotherapeutic process in youth.</p>	<p>The Bibliotherapeutic Process (Halstead, 2009)</p>

	and/or affective needs (Adderholt-Elliott & Eller, 1989; Frasier & McCannon, 1981; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009; Jeon, 1992)
10. Probe discussion following reading.	Required element of discussion (Brown, 1975; Hoagland, 1972; Moses & Zaccaria 1969; Rubin, 1978; Zaccaria & Moses, 1968)
11. Probe metacognition.	Metacognition (Cheng, 1993; Davidson, 1986; Sisk, 1982)
12. Do you have anything you'd like to add?	
<i>Closing Instructions</i>	
Thank the interviewee, remind them of confidentiality, offer when their portrait will be available for review and follow-up interview	

## Appendix H: Follow-Up and Portrait Review Protocols

### *Follow-Up and Portrait Review Protocols*

<i>Interview</i>	<i>Supporting Literature</i>
<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <p>Hello, it’s nice to see you again. As a reminder, participation in this interview is voluntary. My name is Jervaise Pileggi. I am so glad you’ve chosen to continue to participate in my research about gifted adults and bibliotherapy. As a reminder, I am conducting this research as part of my Dissertation in Practice for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Denver. The findings will be shared with my dissertation committee and published. Your name will not be used and a pseudonym will be used instead. No defining characteristics of you will be shared beyond your ethnicity, age range (30s, 40s, etc.), and your level of highest education. You will have an opportunity to review my “portrait” of you to check for accuracy and to ensure that there is no potential harm in what I am including.</p> <p>Have you reviewed the informed consent? Do you have any questions? Do you verbally agree to participate in this study?</p> <p>This interview will be structured as more of a conversation, I have a few specific questions for you, but may also ask you follow-up questions. Remember, this is completely voluntary and if you do not feel comfortable answering a question, it is okay to skip it. You may stop this interview at any time. This interview will take approximately one hour.</p>	<p>Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Billups (2021) encourage an introduction with definitions and expectations.</p>
<p><i>Opening Question</i></p> <p>1. Have you read anything lately that is resonating with you? Probe</p> <p>2. Do you have anything you’d like to add from last time? Probe</p>	<p>Halstead (2009) to determine what they are reading.</p> <p>The Bibliotherapeutic Process (Halstead, 2009) and/or affective needs (Frasier &amp; McCannon, 1981; Adderholt-Elliott &amp; Eller, 1989; Jeon, 1992; Halstead, 2009; Hébert, 2009)</p>

*Content Questions*

3. Keep in mind your portrait won't appear as if you had written it, but does it appear accurate? I won't change the text of any of your quotes, but I could remove the information before or after if it feels too personal or that it could hurt you.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) recommend participant review of portraits.

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4. Probe portrait.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) recommend participant review of portraits.

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5. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

*Closing Instructions*

Thank the interviewee, remind them of confidentiality, thank for participation in the study overall.

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## Appendix I: Interview Note-Taking Sheet

### *Interview Note-Taking Sheet*

<i>Interviewer Notes/Observations (use question numbers as needed)</i>	<i>Nonverbal Cues</i>	<i>Quotable Quotes (write quote or time)</i>
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Adapted from: Billups, F. D. (2021). *Qualitative data collection tools: Design, development, and applications*. Sage.

## Appendix J: Novels Presented in Portraits

### *Participant Novels in Chronological Order as Presented in Portraits*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Novel Title or Series</i>	<i>Author Name</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>First Publication Date</i>
Damia	<i>The Princess and the Pea</i>	Hans Christian Andersen	Children's Literature	1835
	<i>Mexican Gothic</i>	Silvia Moreno-Garcia	Historical Fiction	2020
	<i>The Great Courses</i>	Various on Audible	Varies	Varies
	<i>Harry Potter Series</i>	J.K. Rowling	Bildungsroman	1997
	<i>The Babysitter's Club Series</i>	Ann M. Martin	Children's Literature	1986
	<i>Trixie Belden Series</i>	Julie Campbell Tatham	Mystery	1948
	<i>Nancy Drew Series</i>	Carolyn Keene (pseudonym)	Mystery	1930
	<i>Encyclopedia Brown Series</i>	Donald J. Sobol	Mystery	1963
	<i>The Hardy Boys Series</i>	Franklin W. Dixon (pseudonym)	Mystery	1927
	<i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i>	Norton Juster	Children's Literature	1961
	<i>The Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler</i>	E. L. Konigsburg	Mystery	1967
	<i>The Westing Game</i>	Ellen Raskin	Mystery	1978
	<i>The Dragonriders of Pern Series</i>	Anne McCaffrey	Science Fiction Fantasy	1967
	<i>Talent Universe Series</i>	Anne McCaffrey	Science Fiction Fantasy	1973
	<i>Percy Jackson Series</i>	Rick Riordan	Fantasy	2005
	<i>The Chronicles of Narnia</i>	C. S. Lewis	Fantasy	1950
	<i>The Hunger Games Series</i>	Suzanne Collins	Science Fiction	2008
	<i>Twilight Series</i>	Stephanie Meyer	Fantasy	2005
	<i>The Golden Compass Series</i>	Philip Pullman	Fantasy	1995
	<i>The Hobbit</i>	J. R. R. Tolkien	Fantasy	1937
<i>The Lord of the Rings Series</i>	J. R. R. Tolkien	Fantasy	1955	
<i>The Bible</i>	Unknown	n/a	1611	
<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	J. D. Salinger	Bildungsroman	1951	

	<i>The Anarchist Cookbook</i>	William Powell	Nonfiction	1971
	<i>King Con</i>	Stephen J. Cannell	Thriller	1997
	<i>A Wrinkle in Time</i>	Madeleine L'Engle	Fantasy	1962
	<i>Justin and the Best Biscuits in the World</i>	Mildred Pitts Walter	Children's Literature	1986
	<i>The People Could Fly</i>	Virginia Hamilton	Children's Literature	1985
	<i>The Temple of the Grand Pavilion</i>	Yukio Mishima	Historical Fiction	1956
	<i>Matilda</i>	Roald Dahl	Fantasy	1988
	<i>A Bridge to Terabithia</i>	Katherine Peterson	Realistic Fiction	1977
	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	Nathaniel Hawthorne	Historical Fiction	1850
	<i>Farewell to Manzanar</i>	Jeanne Wakatsuki	Autobiography	1973
	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>	Anne Frank	Autobiography	1947
	<i>The Tower and the Hive Series</i>	Anne McCaffrey	Science Fantasy	1999
	<i>Memoirs of a Geisha</i>	Arthur Golden	Historical Fiction	1997
	<i>The Construct of Asynchronous Development</i>	Linda Kreger Silverman	Educational article	1997
Ariel	<i>Harry Potter Series</i>	J. K. Rowling	Bildungsroman	1997
	<i>Little Women</i>	Louisa May Alcott	Bildungsroman	1868
	<i>Little House on the Prairie</i>	Laura Ingalls Wilder	Historical Fiction	1932
	<i>Anne of Green Gables Series</i>	L. M. Montgomery	Bildungsroman	1908
	<i>Gone With the Wind</i>	Margaret Mitchell	Historical Fiction	1936
	<i>The Secret of Sarah Revere</i>	Anne Rinaldi	Historical Fiction	1995
	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	Jane Austin	Historical Fiction	1813
	<i>Emma</i>	Jane Austin	Historical Fiction	1815
	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>	Jane Austin	Historical Fiction	1811
	<i>American Girl Series</i>	Various	Historical Fiction	1986
	<i>Beloved</i>	Toni Morrison	Historical Fiction	1987

	<i>Of Mice and Men</i>	John Steinbeck	Historical Fiction	1937
	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	William Shakespeare	Tragedy	1588
	<i>Quilt Trilogy Series</i>	Anne Rinaldi	Historical Fiction	1994
	<i>A Stitch in Time</i>	Kelley Armstrong	Historical Fiction	2020
	<i>The Notebook</i>	Nicholas Sparks	Romance	1996
	<i>The Hobbit</i>	J. R. R. Tolkien	Fantasy	1937
	<i>Charlotte's Web</i>	E. B. White	Children's Literature	1952
	<i>...And the Ladies of the Club</i>	Helen Hooven Santmyer	Historical Fiction	1982
	<i>The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You</i>	John C. Maxwell	Nonfiction	1998
Rachel	<i>Ishmael</i>	E.D.E.N. Southworth	Historical Fiction	1850
	<i>11/22/63</i>	Stephen King	Science Fiction	2011
	<i>A Thousand Books to Read Before You Die: A Life-Changing List</i>	James Mustich	Nonfiction	2018
	<i>Anne of Green Gables Series</i>	L. M. Montgomery	Bildungsroman	1908
	<i>Sarah Plain and Tall</i>	Patricia MacLachlan	Children's Literature	1985
	<i>Little House on the Prairie Series</i>	Laura Ingalls Wilder	Historical Fiction	1932
	<i>Nancy Drew Series</i>	Carolyn Keene (pseudonym)	Mystery	1930
	<i>The Firm</i>	John Grisham	Thriller	1991
	<i>The Hunt for Red October</i>	Tom Clancy	Thriller	1984
	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	Charles Dickens	Historical Fiction	1859
	Stephanie Plum unnamed novel	Janet Evanovich	Mystery	1994
	<i>Where the Mountain Meets the Moon</i>	Grace Lin	Children's Literature	2009
	<i>I Rode a Horse of Milk White Jade</i>	Diane L. Wilson	Historical Fiction	1998
	<i>The Lazy Genius Way: Embrace What Matters,</i>	Kendra Adachi	Self-help	2020

	<i>Ditch What Doesn't, and Get Stuff Done</i>			
	<i>Mommy Burnout: How to Reclaim Your Life and Raise Healthier Children in the Process</i>	Sheryl Ziegler	Self-help	2018
	<i>Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA</i>	James Watson	Autobiography	1968
	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	Ray Bradbury	Science Fiction	1953
Pikel	<i>Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Graphic Novel Series</i>	Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird	Comic	1984
	<i>Jurassic Park</i>	Michael Crichton	Science Fiction	1990
	<i>Congo</i>	Michael Crichton	Science Fiction	1980
	<i>The Martian</i>	Andy Weir	Science Fiction	2011
	<i>The Relic</i>	Douglas Preston	Horror	1995
	<i>Airframe</i>	Michael Crichton	Science Fiction	1996
	<i>X-Men Graphic Novel Series</i>	Various	Comic	1963
	<i>The Hardy Boys Series</i>	Franklin W. Dixon (pseudonym)	Mystery	1927
	<i>Dungeons and Dragons</i>	Various	Game	1974
	<i>Boys Life Magazine</i>	Various	Magazine	1911
	<i>Goosebumps Series</i>	R. L. Stine	Horror	1992
	<i>A Wrinkle in Time</i>	Madeleine L'Engle	Fantasy	1962
	<i>No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America</i>	Darnell L. Moore	Nonfiction	2018
	<i>Ahsoka</i>	E. K. Johnston	Science Fiction	2016
	<i>Greywalker Series</i>	Kat Richardson	Fantasy	2006
	<i>The Baby-Sitter's Club Series</i>	Ann M. Martin	Children's Literature	1986
	<i>Nancy Drew Series</i>	Carolyn Keene (pseudonym)	Mystery	1930
	<i>Taming the Tiger Within</i>	Thich Nhat Hanh	Spirituality	2004
	<i>War of the Spider Queen</i>	Various	Fantasy	2002
	<i>In the Blink of an Eye: Dale, Daytona, and the Day the Changed Everything</i>	Michael Waltrip	Autobiography	2011
	<i>To Sleep in a Sea of Stars</i>	Christopher Paolini	Science Fiction	2020

Marie	<i>Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle</i>	Emily Nagoski & Amelia Nagoski	Self-help	2019
	<i>The Flowers in the Attic</i>	V. C. Andrews	Mystery	1979
	<i>The Hunger Games</i>	Suzanne Collins	Science Fiction	2008
	<i>Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret.</i>	Judy Bloom	Bildungsroman	1970
	<i>The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy</i>	Douglas Adams	Science Fiction	1979
	<i>Star Wars Series</i>	Various	Science Fiction	1979
	<i>Harry Potter Series</i>	J.K. Rowling	Bildungsroman	1997
	<i>The Lord of the Rings Series</i>	J.R.R. Tolkien	Fantasy	1955
	<i>The Body Is Not an Apology, Second Edition: The Power of Radical Self-Love</i>	Sonya Renee Taylor	Self-help	2018
	<i>A Little Prince</i>	Antoine de Saint-Exupéry	Children's Literature	1943
	<i>The Alchemist</i>	Paulo Coelho	Fantasy	1988
	<i>Alexander and the Magic Mouse</i>	Martha Sanders	Children's Literature	1969
	<i>Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH</i>	Robert C. O'Brien	Children's Literature	1970
	<i>Steal Like an Artist</i>	Austin Kleon	Self-help	2012
	<i>Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear</i>	Elizabeth Gilbert	Self-help	2015
	<i>Watership Down</i>	Richard Adams	Fantasy	1972
	<i>Cannery Row</i>	John Steinbeck	Historical Fiction	1945
	<i>The Lord of the Flies</i>	William Golding	Dystopia	1954
	<i>1984</i>	George Orwell	Science Fiction	1949
	James	<i>Contact</i>	Carl Sagan	Science Fiction
<i>The Martian</i>		Andy Weir	Science Fiction	2011
<i>Cryptonomicon</i>		Neal Stephenson	Science Fiction	1999
<i>Quicksilver</i>		Neal Stephenson	Science Fiction	2003
<i>Stranger in a Strange Land</i>		Robert A. Heinlein	Science Fiction	1961
<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>		Arthur C. Clarke	Science Fiction	1968
<i>Carrying the Fire: An Astronaut's Journeys</i>		Michael Collins	Autobiography	1974
<i>The Informant</i>		Kurt Eichenwald	Nonfiction	2000

	<i>The Century</i>	Peter Jennings & Todd Brewster	Nonfiction	1998
	<i>This American Life</i>	n/a	Podcast	1995
	<i>Radiolab</i>	n/a	Podcast	2002
	<i>Gateway</i>	Frederik Pohl	Science Fiction	1977
	<i>The Supermen: The Story of Seymour Cray and the Technical Wizards Behind the Supercomputer</i>	Charles J. Murray	Biography	1997
	<i>The Soul of the New Machine</i>	Tracy Kidder	Nonfiction	1981
	<i>Airframe</i>	Michael Crichton	Science Fiction	1996
	<i>Living With Intensity</i>	Susan Daniels & Michael M. Piechowski (Eds.)	Self-help	2008
	<i>The Da Vinci Code</i>	Dan Brown	Mystery	2003
Reyna	<i>Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents</i>	Isabel Wilkerson	Nonfiction	2020
	<i>Americanah</i>	Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie	Contemporary	2013
	<i>The Poisonwood Bible</i>	Barbara Kingsolver	Historical Fiction	1998
	<i>Ahab's Wife: Or, The Star-Gazer</i>	Sena Jeter Naslund	Historical Fiction	1999
	<i>The People of the Book</i>	Geraldine Brooks	Historical Fiction	2008
	<i>Matrix</i>	Lauren Groff	Historical Fiction	2021
	<i>Mrs. Penumbra's 24- Hour Bookstore</i>	Robin Sloan	Mystery	2012
	<i>The Library Book</i>	Susan Orlean	Nonfiction	2018
	<i>The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue</i>	V. E. Schwab	Historical Fiction	2020
	<i>A Gentleman in Moscow</i>	Amor Towles	Historical Fiction	2016
	<i>A Year in Provence</i>	Peter Mayle	Biography	1989
	<i>This is Happiness</i>	Niall Williams	Historical Fiction	2019
	<i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i>	Norton Juster	Children's Literature	1961
	<i>Nancy Drew Series</i>	Carolyn Keene (pseudonym)	Mystery	1930

<i>The Hardy Boys Series</i>	Franklin W. Dixon (pseudonym)	Mystery	1927
<i>The Far Pavilions</i>	M. M. Kaye	Historical Fiction	1978
<i>The Kent Family Chronicles</i>	John Jakes	Historical Fiction	1974
<i>Harry Potter Series</i>	J.K. Rowling	Bildungsroman	1997
<i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	Nathaniel Hawthorne	Historical Fiction	1850
<i>Star Wars Series</i>	Various	Science Fiction	1979
<i>The Hunger Games</i>	Suzanne Collins	Science Fiction	2008
<i>Divergent Series</i>	Veronica Roth	Dystopia	2011
<i>Normal People</i>	Sally Rooney	Contemporary	2018
<i>Conversations With Friends</i>	Sally Rooney	Contemporary	2017
<i>Outlander Series</i>	Diana Gabaldon	Historical Fiction	1991
<i>The Elegance of the Hedgehog</i>	Muriel Barbery	Contemporary	2006
<i>Watership Down</i>	Richard Adams	Fantasy	1972
<i>Little House on the Prairie Series</i>	Laura Ingalls Wilder	Historical Fiction	1932
<i>The Thorn Birds</i>	Colleen McCullough	Historical Fiction	1977
<i>Little Women</i>	Louisa May Alcott	Bildungsroman	1868
<i>Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret.</i>	Judy Bloom	Bildungsroman	1970
<i>Will I Ever Be Good Enough?: Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers</i>	Karyl McBride	Self-help	2008
<i>Count the Ways</i>	Joyce Maynard	Historical Fiction	2021
<i>Eleanor Oliphant in Completely Fine</i>	Gail Honeyman	Contemporary	2017
<i>Beautiful Ruins</i>	Jess Walter	Historical Fiction	2012
<i>We Live in Water</i>	Jess Walter	Contemporary	2013
<i>The Paris Wife</i>	Paula McLain	Historical Fiction	2011
<i>Pachinko</i>	Min Jin Lee	Historical Fiction	2017



## Appendix K: Movies Presented in Portraits

### *Participant Movies Referenced in Chronological Order as Presented in Portraits*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Movie Title</i>	<i>Release Year</i>
Damia	<i>Gone With the Wind</i>	1939
	<i>The Golden Compass</i>	2007
	<i>Easy A</i>	2010
Ariel	<i>Little Women</i>	1994
	<i>Encanto</i>	2021
Pikel	<i>Star Wars</i>	1977
James	<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>	1968
Reyna	<i>Outlander Television Series</i>	2014
	<i>The Lord of the Rings Movie Series</i>	2001
	<i>Little Women</i>	1994