**High School Students Are Reading Too Many Fifth Grade Books**

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by costofcollege

**High school students are reading too many fifth-grade books, according to**[**Sandra Stotsky in *Minding the Campus***](http://www.mindingthecampus.com/originals/2012/04/what_should_kids_be_reading.html)**.**

According to Renaissance Learning’s 2012 report on the books read by almost 400,000 students in grades 9-12 in 2010-2011, the average reading level of the top 40 books is a little above fifth grade (5.3 to be exact). While 27 of the 40 books are UG (upper grade in interest level), a fifth-grade reading level is obviously not high enough for college-level reading. Nor is it high enough for high school-level reading, either, or for informed citizenship.

**Reading scores are trending downward**

… national scores in reading have been moving downward for almost 20 years. Average scores on the grade 12 NAEP reading tests were lower in 2009 than in 1992. In addition, average scores on the SAT fell in 2011, “with the reading score for the high school class of 2011 falling three points to 497, the lowest on record,” and the writing score continuing its decline since the writing test was introduced less than a decade ago. The latter trend is to be expected. As research consistently shows, writing is dependent on reading, and as average reading levels decline, so will writing achievement.

[**From the Lexile website, some key research findings:**](http://www.lexile.com/using-lexile/lexile-measures-and-the-ccssi/)

* **The text complexity of K-12 textbooks has become increasingly “easier” over the last 50 years.** The Common Core Standards quote research showing steep declines in average sentence length and vocabulary level in reading textbooks.
* **The text demands of college and careers have remained consistent or increased over the same time period.** College students are expected to read complex text with greater independence than are high school students.
* **As a result, there is a significant gap between students’ reading abilities and the text demands of their postsecondary pursuits.** Research shows that this gap is equal to a Lexile difference between grade 4 and grade 8 texts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

**Our local high school**I was pleasantly surprised by this reading list from a local freshman English class.  Here are most of the books they read this year as a class, along with their Lexile scores and reading levels.

*A Separate Peace*  –  1110L; 9th grade reading level  
*Durable Goods*  –  620L; 3rd grade reading level  
*Fahrenheit 451*  –  890L; 6th grade reading level  
*Night*  –  570L; 3rd grade reading level   
*Romeo and Juliet*  –  NP\*; 8th grade reading level  
*The Odyssey*  –  Approx. 1000-1100L depending on translation; 9th grade reading level  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*  –  870L; 5th grade reading level

*Of Mice and Men*—630L; 3rd grade reading level

\* NP = Non-Prose, not measured by Lexile

**And now, why you should care:**

**A selection of last year’s choice novels:**

*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*—880L; 5th grade reading level

*The Hunger Games*—810L; 5th grade reading level

*Twilight*—720L; 4th grade reading level

*The Fault in Our Stars*—850L; 5th grade reading level

*The Road—*670L; 3rd grade reading level

*The Book Thief*—730L; 4th grade reading level

*Game of Thrones: A Song of Fire and Ice*—1125L; 9th grade reading level

*Divergent*—700L; 4th grade

*Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief*—4th grade reading level

*Holes*—3rd grade reading level

For the purpose of comparison:

*Captain Underpants and the Big, Bad Battle of the Bionic Booger Boy, Part. II: The Revenge of the Ridiculous Robo-Boogers*—710L; 5th reading level

Berenstain Bears Forget their Manners—620L; 4th grade reading level