

Readability of Top Consumer Health Books: Analysis & Implications



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Introduction

Readability levels were assessed on all book titles from a popular library list of best consumer health books. This was done to discover how literate a reader needed to be in order to successfully read a top-rated book in the category of consumer health.

Methods

- Library Journal's annual list of Best Consumer Health Books for 2010 were assessed for readability.
- Three 10 sentence samples were taken from each the beginning, middle, and end of each book and assessed using the Flesch-Kincaid Score.
- Flesch-Kincaid reading levels and readability and ease of reading scores were derived from Microsoft Office's editing features.
- 18 books were assessed overall.

Sample section from *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* – this mid-book passage registered at a 7.5 reading grade level:

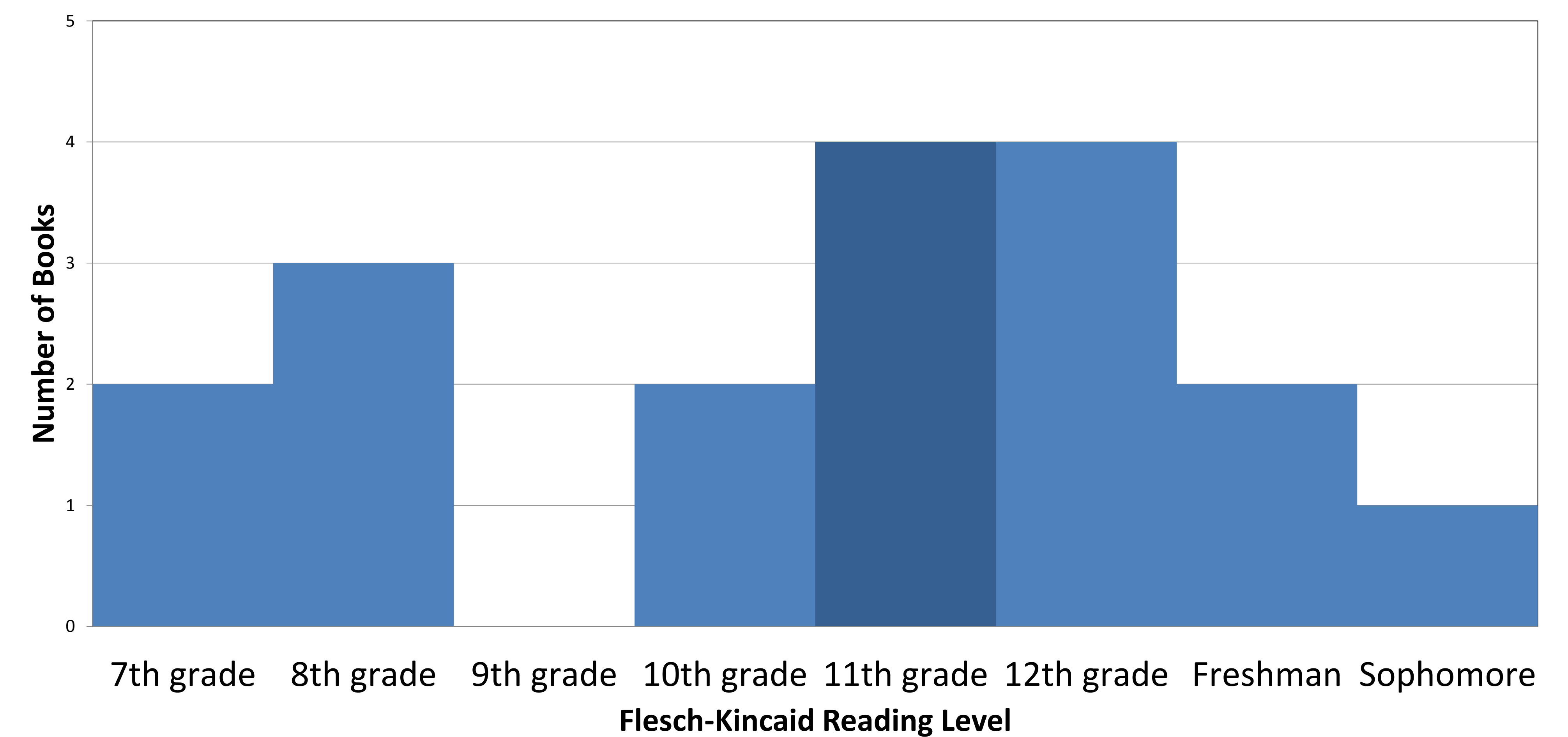
"...Victor McKusick, one of the scientists who'd first published Henrietta's name, happened to be at that table. He told them he could help. Henrietta's husband and children were still patients at Hopkins, he said, so finding them wouldn't be difficult. As a physician on staff, McKusick had access to their medical records and contact information."

Sample section from *Reiki for Life* – this end book passage registered at a 13.1 reading grade level:

"...At Master level, personal and spiritual development is no longer an option--it is a necessity. Reiki will lead you toward a more spiritual way of being through experiences that will give you a greater level of wisdom and understanding about yourself and about other people. To become a Reiki Master is to become the embodiment of Reiki--the embodiment of love, light, healing, harmony and balance. "

Library Journal 2010 Top Consumer Health Books - Reading Level

Average reading level = 10.94 (almost 11th grade)
 Median reading level = 11.1 (11th grade)



Implications

- The results assume that the target audience is a well-educated reader, an assumption which may not always be the case.
- The inclusion of readability levels would be excellent supplementary information for top consumer health literature.
- Librarians should check the readability on selected consumer health books when making purchasing decisions.

Limitations

Expanding on this research would involve scanning the entire text of each book to obtain the complete Flesch-Kincaid reading level.

Simplest

Reading Level

Most Complex

