



The Psychobehavioral Impact of Literature

A Study on the Emotional Effects of Bibliotherapy in Adolescents

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Timeline

Mid-October → decide project topic, start background research

Late October → finish background research, create project overview

November → write our main question, hypothesis, and plan out the experimental design

December 04 → announcements are sent out to the school about our study, we've started to collect participants

Late December → collected consent forms, sent out short stories and study forms

January 12 → all short stories and study forms are due

Mid-January → make observations, analysis, conclusions, sources of error

Late January → start our slide show and tri fold

February 05 → everything is done (slide show, logbook, tri fold)

February 06 → school science fair

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Project Overview

In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in youth mental health challenges, making emotional well-being one of the most urgent issues facing students today. While traditional therapies are often used, we became interested in a powerful but lesser-known approach: **bibliotherapy**, the use of books to improve mental health.

Our project explores not just whether bibliotherapy is effective, but also asks: **can certain genres improve mood more than others—and can personality play a role in which genres work best?**

By combining psychology, literature, and data analysis, our goal is to take bibliotherapy a step further by identifying **personalized reading strategies** that could one day help educators, counsellors, and mental health professionals support youth in new and meaningful ways.

Main Question

Which genres are most effective for bibliotherapy, and does personality affect which genre works best?

Hypothesis

If one reads the coming-of-age genre, then they will find that their mood and actions improve because they will feel a sense of connection and relatability to the main character, which can reassure them that they are not alone.

Objectives

In this project, we would like to achieve the following:

- To investigate how reading different book genres affects a person's mood.
- To explore whether certain genres are more effective in improving emotional well-being.
- To examine whether personality traits (e.g., introversion vs. extroversion) influence how individuals respond to different genres.
- To contribute to the growing conversation around youth mental health and explore accessible, low-cost methods of emotional support.

Background Research

The Brain

1. How does the brain work?

Obviously, it is very hard to explain exactly how the brain works. But overall, the brain has many different regions responsible for different things. It also has billions of neurons, which are nerve cells that send electrical and chemical signals all over your body that allow you to do basically everything. The brain processes information from the senses and controls all bodily functions, whether that be walking or the beating of your heart.

Communication

Brain and Whole Body: The brain is connected to the whole body through a network of nerves that travel through the spinal cord. This allows rapid communication, such as when you pull your hand away from a hot kettle.

Neurons and synapses: As mentioned earlier, the brain has billions of neurons organized into complex circuits. When a neuron receives enough signals, it “fires,” meaning it sends signals to other connected neurons. It sends signals through the neurotransmitters into the synapse, which is the gap between cells.

2. What are the parts of the brain?

The brain can be divided into 3 main sections: the forebrain, the midbrain, and the hindbrain.

The forebrain

The cerebrum

- The cerebrum is divided into two **hemispheres**: the left and right hemispheres. The hemispheres are not connected directly, but rather through nerve fibres that communicate with each other. The left hemisphere controls the right side of the body, and the right hemisphere controls the left side. There is a myth that the left hemisphere is the logical hemisphere, and the right is the creative hemisphere. But this is not true; both hemispheres have logical and creative components, it is just that one side may have more of these components than the other. The cerebrum spans across parts of the forebrain, midbrain, and hindbrain.

Each **hemisphere** has lobes that specialize in different functions:

- **The frontal lobe** is responsible for the following: Reasoning, as in processing information, logic, judgment, creativity, and decision-making. Social Understanding—being aware of social norms, what and what not to say. Executive Functions—skills needed to do everyday tasks, such as memory, self-control, and cognitive ability. Intentional movement of body parts. And *learning* and recalling *information*.

- **The motor cortex** is at the back of the frontal lobe, and it is responsible for the intentional movement of body parts: planning, controlling, and executing voluntary movements.

- **The parietal lobe** supports senses such as taste, smell, and touch. It also supports *reading* and arithmetic.

- **The somatosensory cortex** is located in front of the parietal lobes. It acquires information about temperature, taste, touch, and movement from the rest of the body.

- **The occipital lobe** *processes images from the eyes and connects that information to images kept in memory.*

- **The temporal lobe** has an area designated for receiving information from the ears. Another portion of the temporal lobe helps with forming and retrieving memories, including those associated with music. The other parts of this lobe relate memories to the senses of taste, sight, sound, and touch.

Each of these next structures lies within the cerebrum and the spinal cord. They each have two identical components, one on each side of the brain:

The hippocampus: Sends memories to different parts of the cerebrum and retrieves the memories when necessary.

The hypothalamus: Controls chemicals that make one feel excited, angry, and upset. It wakes a person up in the morning and sends signals to the adrenal glands before something scary or exciting.

The thalamus: Conducts signals between the cerebrum and the spinal cord.

Basal ganglia: Clusters of nerve cells that surround the thalamus. Responsible for initiating and combining voluntary movements and choosing which movements to initiate.

The midbrain:

Lies on top of the brainstem, is responsible for auditory and visual processing, and controls some reflexes.

The Hindbrain:

Includes the top part of the spinal cord, the brainstem, and the cerebellum.

- **The cerebellum** coordinates and helps with learned movements: sports, instruments, etc. It controls vital functions, such as respiration and heart rate.

The Cerebral Cortex:

Most information processing takes place in the cerebral cortex. It is a thick surface of the brain covering the cerebrum and cerebellum. The folds of the cerebral cortex add to the surface area and, therefore, the volume of information that can be processed.

3. What parts of the brain are used when reading?

Four main parts of the brain are used when reading:

| | | | | |
|----------|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| | Visual Cortex | Phonological Cortex | Semantic Cortex | Syntactic Cortex |
| Function | Helps recognize | Helps relate the sounds to | Stores word meanings | Helps us understand the |

| | | | | |
|--|-------------------|---------|--|----------------------------------|
| | letters and words | letters | | rules and structure of sentences |
|--|-------------------|---------|--|----------------------------------|

What is a cortex?

The cortex is the outermost layer of tissue in an organ, meaning it isn't just in the brain. However, there is a more specific term we use for the cortex in the brain, which is the cerebral cortex.

The cerebral cortex is the outermost layer of the brain, also known as gray matter. It is known as gray matter due to the lack of the fatty myelin sheath, which "allows electrical impulses to transmit quickly and efficiently along the nerve cells" (Vorwick 2023). It has many different functions, and it is also where the different lobes of the brain are.

Different lobes of the brain that are used when reading:

- The **parietal temporal region** (where a written word is separated into the letters/sounds that it consists of)
- The **occipital-temporal region** (where the brain stores the look and meaning of words)
- The **frontal region** (where speech is produced)

4. How reading takes place

To understand the alphabet, people must know how to speak, so the sounds of letters can be related. Learning to speak has become a natural part of the brain, and children can learn it on their own. “But evolution has never shaped the brain to read. No brain structures have been developed through evolution to make sense of letters and written words.” (Brain.Facts.org, 2017, 2:45). Reading is a recent invention, which is why people have not yet evolved to naturally read. The brain recycles circuits that recognize faces and uses them to recognize letters. This portion of the brain is found in the temporal lobe.

5. How does reading impact the brain’s neuroplasticity?

Neuroplasticity is the brain’s ability to change and adapt due to experiences. This is the brain rewiring its neurons to reorganize neural connections throughout life. Although neuroplasticity happens most during childhood, it happens all throughout your lifetime. Reading can impact the brain’s neuroplasticity by strengthening certain areas of the brain that are used when reading, and increasing grey and white matter volume. Reading also improves communication between the left and right brain hemispheres and strengthens neural connections.

6. How is reading linked to stress reduction or mental health?

Reading reduces stress levels, which can potentially help to calm your nervous system. It also enhances memory and focus, which improves overall cognitive function. It helps with creativity and problem-solving, builds emotional strength and resilience, improves sleep quality, and even improves communication and confidence.

Bibliotherapy

7. What is bibliotherapy, and how does it relate to the brain's emotional system?

In a nutshell, bibliotherapy is the practice of using books and literature as therapy. It can be used to help anyone, but it is most commonly used on patients with anxiety, depression, and other mood disorders. Bibliotherapists typically choose fiction for their patients, but literature of any genre can be used.

Bibliotherapy relates to the brain's emotional system by enhancing empathy and social skills, reducing stress, reducing depression and anxiety, and helping individuals understand their own personal emotions, feelings, and growth.

8. Has bibliotherapy been studied in youth or students before?

Yes, bibliotherapy has been studied in many youth and students before.

What were the outcomes?

In an experiment conducted on 53 Turkish 10th graders, with 33 students in a story-reading group and 20 students in a control group for comparison, the results showed that reading stories led to improvements in students' mindfulness, optimism, happiness, and other positive emotions. This caused a reduction in depression, anxiety, pessimism, and other negative emotions. This was over a 5-week period, and results were in small to large effect sizes. Overall, bibliotherapy has been a lot more effective in depressive adolescents.

9. What are the benefits of bibliotherapy compared to traditional therapy?

Bibliotherapy offers numerous benefits:

Social Awareness

Bibliotherapy helps grow empathy and understanding of others, especially fiction.

Theory of Mind → the human ability to understand others' emotions and mental states

Cognitive Function

It can also enhance academic performance for most students. Contrary to popular belief that reading can only improve your performance in subjects like English, research suggests that reading can improve your grades in subjects such as math and science, too. This means that reading can improve your thinking and problem-solving skills.

Wisdom/Emotional Support

Wisdom and emotional comfort can also be provided through reading, due to the character's development and storyline. In a way, readers are usually able to see themselves in the characters, which could offer relief. Bibliotherapy is known to effectively reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in adolescents.

Health Advantages

Interestingly, reading offers significant health advantages. Researchers found that elderly people who read lived two more years on average, mostly due to mental stimulation. This means that more emotionally stimulating literature could be the reason for longer survival.

Cost/Other Demands

Overall, bibliotherapy typically costs less than psychotherapy (traditional therapy), provides greater privacy, has lower staffing demands, and is easier to use. This can make it a better option in low and middle-income countries.

10. How do professionals choose books for bibliotherapy?

Professionals typically focus on these three fundamentals when choosing books for bibliotherapy:

1. **Safety:** The reader needs to feel safe exploring the emotions and themes in the book. The writing should be authentic and trustworthy.
2. **Connection:** Bibliotherapists usually choose books in which the protagonist is going through something similar to what the patient is experiencing. This can provide opportunities for the reader to understand

and empathize with the character, and can also increase their feeling of belonging.

3. **Action:** After reading the book, the patient should feel encouraged and prepared to overcome their traumas. The bibliotherapist will choose books that they feel will make the patient encouraged and prepared.

Variables

Independent Variable

- Genres
- Short stories

Dependent Variable

- The mood of the participants

Controlled Variable

- Participants
- Length of the story
- How participants rate their mood (same scale for everyone)

Experimental Design

Materials

- Survey platform (Google Docs)
- Sample group of participants (grades 5-12)
- Book stories from different genres
- Computer/laptop for data analysis
- Spreadsheet software (Google Sheets)

Procedure

1. **Gathered participants** (ages 10-17)
2. **Generated short stories** (around 1-2 pages) using AI from different genres, including:
 - Fantasy

- Romance
- Mystery
- Horror
- Coming-Of-Age
- Dystopian Fiction
- Thriller/Adventure

3. Participants read the stories

4. Participants filled out a **Google Form to collect data on:**

- Mood before reading
- Mood after reading
- What could have impacted the results before and after
- Personality type (introvert, extrovert, ambivert)

5. Collected all responses and organized the data in a spreadsheet (Google Sheets).

6. Analyzed the data by comparing:

- Mood changes before and after each genre
- Patterns between personality type, age, and genre effectiveness
- Any significant trends in emotional impact

7. Summarized findings using charts and graphs, and wrote a conclusion based on observed patterns and data

Short Stories

Fantasy:

The Lantern That Learned to Sing

On the edge of the village of Willowmere stood a crooked tower that everyone pretended not to see. It leaned like it was listening to secrets, and at night, a soft glow sometimes flickered in its highest window. The grown-ups said it was only moonlight and old glass. The children knew better.

Mira knew best of all.

On the night the lantern began to sing, Mira was supposed to be in bed. Instead, she sat on her windowsill, counting stars and wishing she were brave enough to find out what lived in the tower. She was ten, small for her age, with a habit of asking questions that made adults sigh. Her favourite question—*Why?*—had never earned her a good answer about the tower.

Then the song drifted across the fields.

It wasn't loud. It sounded like a hum at first, then like words wrapped in music. The notes shimmered, warm and hopeful, and Mira felt them in her chest, as if her heart had leaned closer to listen.

She slipped on her boots, grabbed her coat, and climbed down the apple tree before she could think better of it.

The tower door was unlocked.

Inside, dust floated like tiny stars. Shelves bent under the weight of books and jars and odd little machines. At the center of the room stood a lantern on a table, glowing gold. Its glass sides were etched with pictures—mountains, rivers, a dragon curled around a moon.

The lantern sang.

“Hello?” Mira whispered.

The song stopped. The light dimmed, then brightened again.

“Oh!” said a voice, thin and surprised. “A listener.”

Mira’s mouth fell open. “You’re... talking.”

“I can,” the lantern said proudly. “I don’t always. It’s nicer when someone listens.”

“Why were you singing?” Mira asked, because *why* was what she did best.

“I was lonely,” the lantern admitted. “And worried.”

“About what?”

The lantern’s light flickered. “The tower’s keeper is gone. Without him, I’m running out of stories.”

“Stories?” Mira repeated.

“I burn on stories,” said the lantern. “That’s how I shine. Brave ones, kind ones, foolish ones too. When people forget their stories, I fade.”

Mira thought of Willowmere—of how quiet it had become, how people hurried past one another with eyes on the ground. “If you fade,” she said slowly, “what happens?”

“The tower sleeps,” said the lantern. “And so does a little bit of the world.”

Mira swallowed. This sounded like a job too big for someone who still tripped over her own feet. But the lantern’s glow was already dimmer.

“I can help,” she said, surprising herself. “I can bring you stories.”

The lantern brightened, hopeful. “Will you?”

“Yes,” Mira said. “I promise.”

She started the next day.

Mira told stories to anyone who would listen and listened to anyone who would tell them. She sat with Old Ben while he remembered the river flooding and the day he learned to swim. She listened to her friend Lio talk about his fear of the dark and how he counted steps to be brave. She asked her mother about the song she used to sing when Mira was a baby.

Every night, Mira returned to the tower and poured the stories into the lantern. The etched pictures on its glass shifted and grew—new rivers, new faces, a dragon with a friendly smile.

The lantern shone brighter than it ever had.

But something else changed, too. People in Willowmere began to notice one another again. They waved. They talked. Laughter spilled into the streets. On warm evenings, families gathered to share tales by firelight.

One night, as Mira finished a story about a foolish hero who learned to ask for help, the lantern glowed so brightly that the room filled with gold.

“You’ve done it,” the lantern said, voice strong and clear. “The stories are flowing again.”

Mira smiled, tired and happy. “Does that mean you’re not lonely anymore?”

“I’ll never be lonely while stories are told,” the lantern replied. “But I have one more thing to give you.”

The light gathered itself, shrinking until it fit into a small lantern Mira could hold in her hands.

“For me?” she asked.

“For Willowmere,” said the lantern. “You’re the keeper now.”

Mira’s hands trembled as she took it. The lantern felt warm and steady, like a promise.

“What if I mess up?” she asked.

The lantern laughed, a sound like bells. “Then you’ll have a story about it.”

Mira carried the lantern home. She didn’t hide it in the tower. She set it on her windowsill, where its glow could spill into the night.

And every time Willowmere felt a little darker, a little quieter, Mira lifted the lantern and asked the best question she knew.

“Why?”

The lantern would hum, and somewhere, a story would begin.

Romance:

The Day the Notes Learned Each Other’s Names

Ellie first noticed the notes on a Tuesday—the kind of Tuesday that felt like it would never be special.

They were tucked inside her locker, folded into neat squares. No name. Just music notes drawn in pencil, looping across the paper like they were dancing. Beneath them were words:

For the girl who hums in the hallway.

Ellie felt her face warm. She *did* hum in the hallway. She hadn't realized anyone else noticed.

That afternoon, she sat on the front steps of her apartment building and played the notes on her old keyboard. The melody was gentle and hopeful, like the start of something that didn't know where it was going yet.

The next morning, Ellie left a note of her own in the same locker. She drew a treble clef and wrote:

It's beautiful. Who are you?

The reply came the next day.

Someone who likes how you never stop humming.

Ellie smiled so hard her cheeks hurt.

From then on, notes appeared almost every day. Sometimes they were melodies, sometimes questions, sometimes tiny drawings—stars, leaves, coffee cups. Ellie learned that her mystery writer liked rainy days, always took the long way home, and was afraid of speaking in front of crowds. She shared that she played piano when she was nervous, loved astronomy, and wanted to travel somewhere she'd never been.

They never wrote their names.

Weeks passed. Autumn deepened, and the trees around the school turned gold and red. One afternoon, Ellie found a note that made her heart stumble.

There's a winter concert next Friday, it read.

I wrote a song. I want you to hear it. I'll play it after the last performance.

Ellie stared at the paper. She had never heard her note-friend play in person. The thought was thrilling—and terrifying.

She wrote back that night.

I'll be there.

The auditorium buzzed on Friday evening, filled with parents and students and the sound of tuning instruments. Ellie sat in the third row, hands folded tightly in her lap. Each performer walked onstage, played, bowed, and left. Her heart beat faster with every song.

Finally, the stage emptied.

A single person stepped into the light.

It was Sam.

Ellie's breath caught. Sam sat two rows behind her in math class. He doodled in the margins of his notebook and never raised his hand. She had seen him smile exactly once.

He sat at the piano.

The song he played was the melody from the first note—only fuller now, braver. It rose and fell like a conversation, like two voices learning how to fit together.

Ellie felt tears sting her eyes.

When the last note faded, the room was quiet for a heartbeat before applause filled the air. Sam stood, bowed quickly, and looked out into the crowd—right at Ellie.

After the concert, Ellie waited by the side door, heart racing. Sam stepped out, holding a folded piece of paper.

“I was hoping you’d come,” he said softly.

Ellie laughed, nervous and happy. “I was hoping you were you.”

He handed her the note. This one had words instead of music.

Hi. I’m Sam.

Ellie took out her pen and wrote on the back.

Hi, Sam. I’m Ellie.

They stood there for a moment, smiling at each other, the cool night air wrapped around them.

“So,” Sam said, “do you want to write the next song together?”

Ellie nodded. “Yeah. I think I’d like that.”

And just like that, the notes had learned each other’s names.

Mystery:

The Case of the Missing Bell

Everyone at Alderwood Middle knew one rule by heart:

Never touch the old bell.

It sat in a glass case near the front office, dull and cracked, with a plaque that read:

FOUND: 1893

Teachers said it once rang to start the very first school day. Students said it was haunted. Leo didn't believe either story—but he did believe mysteries had answers.

So when the bell disappeared, Leo noticed before anyone else.

On Monday morning, he stopped short in the hallway. The glass case stood open. The velvet cushion inside was empty.

"No way," he muttered.

By lunchtime, the whole school buzzed. Teachers whispered. The principal frowned so hard it looked permanent. Announcements promised "a thorough investigation," which Leo knew usually meant *nothing would happen*.

That afternoon, Leo gathered his two best friends behind the gym.

Maya was sharp and observant, the kind of person who noticed missing commas in textbooks. Ben was creative, full of wild ideas and even wilder theories.

"The bell didn't vanish," Leo said. "Someone took it."

"Obviously," Ben said. "Or it grew legs."

Maya ignored him. "The case wasn't broken. That means whoever took it had access—or knew how to open it."

Leo nodded. "First clue."

They retraced the hallway. Leo knelt by the glass case. "Look—dust smudges. Someone reached in carefully."

Maya pointed to the floor. "And that scratch? The bell's heavy. It was dragged, not carried far."

"So they didn't want anyone to see it," Ben said. "Suspicious."

Their next stop was the office. Leo pretended to tie his shoe while Maya scanned the sign-in sheet.

"Custodian was here early," she whispered. "So was the music teacher."

Ben's eyes lit up. "A bell. Music. Coincidence?"

"Maybe," Leo said. "Or maybe not."

They followed the scratch marks down the hall—to the music room.

Inside, shelves of instruments lined the walls. Everything looked normal, until Leo noticed something under the piano bench: a corner of faded velvet.

"The same kind from the case," Maya said quietly.

Before they could say more, the door creaked open.

Mr. Calder, the music teacher, froze when he saw them.

"You're not supposed to be in here after school," he said.

Leo took a breath. "We know about the bell."

For a moment, Mr. Calder looked tired rather than angry. He sighed and opened a closet.

Inside, wrapped carefully in cloth, was the old bell.

“I didn’t steal it,” Mr. Calder said quickly. “I borrowed it.”

“Borrowed?” Ben echoed.

“It’s Founder’s Day tomorrow,” Mr. Calder explained. “I wanted to restore the bell and ring it during the assembly—just like the first day of school. But if I’d asked, the answer would’ve been no.”

Maya frowned. “You should’ve told someone.”

“I know,” he said. “I panicked.”

The next day, the principal listened, arms crossed. When Mr. Calder finished, she sighed.

“You should’ve followed the rules,” she said. “But your idea... it matters.”

At the assembly, the bell was returned to its case—polished, shining.

When it rang, the sound was clear and bright, echoing through the gym.

Leo smiled.

The mystery was solved—but more importantly, the bell finally rang again.

Horror:

The Thing That Knocked Back

Everyone in Briarwood knew the rule:

If you heard knocking at night, don’t answer.

The rule existed because of the old Hartwell House at the end of Maple Street. It had been empty for years, its windows dark and its paint peeling like old scabs. Kids dared each other to ring the doorbell during the day, but no one went near it after sunset.

Except Eli.

Eli wasn't brave. He was curious, which was worse.

On the night it happened, a storm rattled the town. Rain tapped against Eli's bedroom window as he lay awake, listening. His parents were out late, and the house felt too quiet, like it was holding its breath.

Then came the sound.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

Eli froze.

The sound didn't come from the front door. It came from his wall.

Slowly, he sat up in bed. His room shared a fence with the Hartwell House next door. That made no sense—there was open space between them. Nothing should be knocking there.

Knock. Knock.

"Hello?" Eli whispered, hating himself for it.

The knocking stopped.

Eli exhaled, telling himself it was pipes. Or branches. Or thunder echoing strangely.

Then his wall knocked back.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

The sound came from inside the wall, deeper this time, as if something were answering him.

Eli scrambled out of bed and backed away. His heart hammered. “Stop,” he said, louder now.

Silence.

He stood there shaking, counting seconds. One... two... ten...

Relief crept in.

Then a voice whispered his name.

“Eli.”

It was soft and dry, like wind through dead leaves.

“Nope,” Eli said, grabbing his flashlight. He turned it on and aimed it at the wall.

Something moved.

A long shadow slid across the paint, stretching in the wrong direction. It bent upward, forming the shape of fingers pressing from the inside.

The wall bulged.

Eli screamed.

The shadow knocked again—harder this time—and cracks spiderwebbed across the wall. Dust fell to the floor.

“Don’t answer,” Eli whispered, remembering the rule.

But the thing kept knocking.

Knock. Knock. Knock.

The sound grew impatient.

Desperate, Eli grabbed the heaviest book on his desk and threw it at the wall. The book hit—and vanished.

The knocking stopped.

The shadow retreated.

The wall smoothed, as if nothing had ever touched it.

Eli slid to the floor, sobbing. He stayed there until his parents came home, until morning light filled his room and made everything look normal again.

They didn't believe him, of course. The wall was solid. No cracks. No marks.

But that night, as Eli lay awake again, he heard knocking from across the fence.

From the direction of the Hartwell House.

Knock. Knock.

And far away, something knocked back.

Coming-Of-Age:

The Summer I Learned to Let Go

The summer before eighth grade was the first time everything felt different, even though nothing had really changed.

Our town still had one grocery store, one stoplight, and the same dusty baseball field where I'd spent every summer since I was little. But this summer, my bike felt too small, my favourite hoodie felt childish, and my best friend Noah was moving away.

We sat on the swings at Pine Park the day he told me. The chains creaked as we rocked back and forth.

"My dad got a new job," Noah said, staring at his shoes. "We leave in August."

"Oh," I said. I tried to sound normal. "That's cool."

It wasn't cool.

For the rest of the summer, we did everything we always did—rode our bikes to the creek, dared each other to jump off the old log, stayed up too late playing video games. But everything felt heavier, like we were trying to hold onto time instead of just living in it.

One afternoon, we found the box.

It was buried in the back of my closet, dusty and half-forgotten. Inside were action figures with chipped paint, a stack of trading cards, and a folded piece of paper labeled **Future Plans** in my messy handwriting from years ago.

We sat on my bedroom floor and read it.

When we grow up, we will live in the same house. We will have a dog. We will never stop being best friends.

Noah laughed, but it sounded tight. “We were pretty confident.”

I swallowed. “Guess we were wrong.”

“Or just younger,” he said.

That night, I lay awake thinking about how unfair it was that growing up meant losing things. I wanted to stay in the version of the world where promises never broke, and summers lasted forever.

But time didn’t listen.

In August, the air turned cooler, and moving boxes filled Noah’s house. On his last night in town, we biked to the baseball field. The lights were off, the bleachers empty.

We sat in the outfield grass.

“I’m scared,” Noah admitted quietly.

“Me too,” I said.

We didn’t talk much after that. We didn’t need to.

The next morning, his car disappeared down the road. I stood in my driveway long after it was gone, feeling like someone had taken a piece of my childhood with them.

School started. Eighth grade was louder, faster, harder. I joined a new club. I made new friends. Some days, I still missed Noah so badly it hurt.

But one afternoon, while cleaning my room, I found the box again.

This time, I didn’t put everything back.

I kept the paper. I kept one trading card. The rest, I packed away.

That was when I realized something important.

Growing up didn't mean forgetting who I'd been. It meant choosing what to carry forward.

And for the first time, the future didn't feel quite so scary.

Dystopian Fiction:

The Last Number on the List

Every morning at exactly 7:00, the screens turned on.

They lit the walls of every home in Grayline City with the same soft blue glow and displayed the same message:

TODAY'S USEFUL CITIZENS

Names scrolled beneath it in perfect order.

Lena stood at the kitchen table, backpack half-zipped, watching the list with her mother. They didn't speak. Talking during the list was discouraged—not by law, but by habit. Everyone knew better than to interrupt something that decided your future.

The list ended, as it always did, with a quiet chime.

Lena's name wasn't there.

Her mother let out a breath she'd been holding. "You're still safe," she said, forcing a smile. "Go to school."

Safe. That word used to mean protected. Now it meant *not chosen yet*.

At school, the teachers pretended nothing was wrong. Lessons went on about efficiency, productivity, and contribution. Posters on the walls read: **EVERYONE HAS A PURPOSE** and **PURPOSE IS MEASURED**.

Lena stared at her notebook, her pencil unmoving.

Her best friend, Tomas, sat beside her. He had been quiet all morning, which wasn't like him.

When the lunch bell rang, he didn't stand up.

"Tomas?" Lena whispered.

He swallowed. "My name was on the list today."

Lena's chest tightened. "That's... that's good, right?"

Tomas nodded slowly. "That's what they say."

The list meant reassignment. Useful citizens were sent to "higher contribution zones." No one ever came back. The city said it was because they were too busy being important. Kids like Lena weren't sure they believed that anymore.

After school, Lena walked Tomas home. The streets were clean and colourless, lined with gray buildings and silent cameras that watched without blinking.

"Do you want to run?" Lena asked suddenly.

Tomas stopped. "Where?"

"I don't know. Somewhere without screens."

He smiled sadly. "They'd catch us."

That night, Lena couldn't sleep. At 6:59, she sat up in bed, heart pounding. The screen on her wall flickered to life.

TODAY'S USEFUL CITIZENS

Names scrolled.

She searched for Tomas's name again, even though she knew it wouldn't be there twice.

Then she saw something else.

At the very bottom of the list, smaller than the rest, was a new line:

PENDING EVALUATION: LENA HARROW

Her stomach dropped.

At breakfast, her mother's hands shook as she poured tea. "Pending means they're watching you," she said softly. "Be careful. Don't ask questions. Don't stand out."

But Lena couldn't stop thinking about Tomas. About how scared he'd looked when he tried to be brave.

At school, his desk was empty.

That afternoon, Lena did something she wasn't supposed to do. She skipped the walk home and followed the old train tracks beyond the city fence—a place everyone pretended didn't exist.

There, hidden beneath rusted metal and weeds, she found a faded wall covered in writing. Names. Hundreds of them. Scratched, painted, carved.

Useful citizens.

Somewhere between the names, someone had written:

WE WERE HERE. WE MATTERED.

Lena traced the words with her fingers. Her eyes burned.

The next morning, the screens turned on again.

TODAY'S USEFUL CITIZENS

Lena stood alone this time. Her mother was already crying.

Her name appeared halfway down the list.

Lena didn't scream. She didn't run. She packed her bag and slipped one thing into her pocket—a small piece of paper she'd torn from her notebook.

On it, she had written a name.

Tomas.

As the transport doors closed behind her, Lena looked back at Grayline City, at the screens, the lists, the lies.

She didn't know where she was going.

But she knew this: even if the city erased her, she would remember.

And sometimes, remembering is the last kind of freedom left.

Adventure/Thriller:

The Storm at Blackrock Pass

The warning sirens began just as the rain started to fall.

Evan was halfway up the trail at Blackrock Pass when his phone buzzed with an emergency alert:

SEVERE STORM. SEEK SHELTER IMMEDIATELY.

“Perfect,” he muttered.

He was hiking with his older sister, Mara, who had convinced him that this would be a “simple afternoon adventure.” Now dark clouds rolled over the mountains, swallowing the sky.

Thunder cracked.

“We need to turn back,” Evan said.

Mara scanned the trail. The path behind them was already slick with mud, and the river below roared louder than it had an hour ago.

“The bridge,” she said. “If we can reach the old ranger bridge, we’ll have cover.”

They ran.

Rain slammed down, soaking them in seconds. Wind tore through the trees, bending branches like matchsticks. Another thunderclap shook the ground—and then came a sound Evan didn’t expect.

A sharp *snap*.

The bridge lurched.

Mara skidded to a stop. The wooden bridge that crossed the ravine hung crooked, one of its support ropes fraying under the strain of the storm.

“We can’t cross that,” Evan shouted over the rain.

Before Mara could answer, the ground beneath Evan’s feet gave way. Mud slid toward the ravine, pulling him with it.

“Evan!” Mara grabbed his arm.

For a terrifying second, he dangled over the rushing water, heart pounding so loudly he couldn’t hear the storm. His fingers slipped.

“Don’t let go!” he yelled.

“I won’t,” Mara said, her voice tight with effort.

Evan kicked his boots into the mud, searching for something solid. His hand brushed against a rock. He grabbed it and pushed upward.

Together, they rolled away from the edge just as another chunk of earth collapsed into the ravine.

They lay there, gasping.

“That was way too close,” Evan said.

Mara nodded. “We’re not safe yet.”

They spotted a narrow ledge along the cliff face, leading toward a dark opening in the rock.

“A cave,” Evan said. “It might hold.”

The wind fought them as they edged along the ledge, fingers numb, hearts racing. A fallen branch crashed nearby, missing them by inches.

At last, they reached the cave and scrambled inside.

The storm raged for what felt like hours. They sat in the darkness, listening to thunder roll across the mountains, knowing how close they had come to disaster.

Finally, the rain softened. The wind faded.

When they stepped back into the open, the world looked washed clean and quiet. Sunlight broke through the clouds, glinting off the swollen river below.

Evan let out a shaky laugh. “Next time,” he said, “we check the weather.”

Mara smiled, relief clear on her face. “Deal.”

They started down the trail—tired, muddy, and grateful to be heading home.

Observations

We present our observations from the following short stories:

Fantasy

- Everyone felt calm or happy after reading this excerpt, and the way that they were feeling changed (slightly) for all, except one individual with an extroverted personality. This most likely isn't due to the introversion-extroversion spectrum, but rather to the fact that the participant was feeling calm to start with. Older participants (13 and up) tended to feel calm after reading, while the youngest participants felt happy. The extroverted individual was 13 years old and was feeling calm to start with, so there was no change in emotion.

- An observation that we made is that ***if a participant was feeling a strong negative emotion before, their emotion after was a strong positive emotion.*** If a participant was feeling a weak negative/neutral emotion before, they felt a weak positive/neutral emotion after. E.g. a participant was feeling annoyed/angry beforehand, and felt happy afterwards. Other participants were feeling normal/calm before and felt calm after. This observation also occurred with the mystery genre.

- Participants rated their emotions on a scale from 1-10, 1 being negative and 10 being positive. The ratings with a more drastic change between before and after were from a young participant and a participant who was feeling annoyed before. The rest of the participants barely had a change in rating before and after, the differences being only 1 or no points higher.

- Overall, this genre worked well for bibliotherapy; it managed to calm the participants and made them happier. ***The reason this story was able to calm the participants is likely because it provided security through a happy ending.***

Romance

- All but two participants felt happy after reading this excerpt. The two participants had answered differently as they related this story to something in their lives. One of them was stressed over exams and studying, and felt calm after reading because “Studying is stressful and taking a few minutes to read a short and cute story calms things down.” The other participant felt inspired after reading this specific excerpt. They said, “I’ve been looking for romantic things to do for me and my girlfriend’s 2-month anniversary, and this has inspired me to plan something.”

- Participants rated their emotions on a scale from 1-10, 1 being negative and 10 being positive. Based on what they felt before, participants rated their feelings afterwards 1 or 2 points higher.

- Overall, this genre works well for bibliotherapy, as it has a sweet and mood-uplifting quality. Had the story been replaced with a novel, the results would have likely been stronger.

Mystery

- All of the participants rated their emotions as an 8 after reading this excerpt. One of the youngest participants had a huge jump in emotion; they stated that they were feeling angry (3) because of their homework, but reading the story made them feel normal (8). Other participants were already at an emotion rating of 7 or 8, so their rating was one or no spots up afterwards. Some participants noted it as a nice story that made them smile, while other participants found the story to not be impactful or meaningful, as it was “just some story about a missing bell that got found with a music teacher out of all the possible options.” People either felt normal or happy/interested after reading this excerpt.

- Overall, this genre was good for most participants, but had the story been more intriguing or a longer story with more buildup, the results would have likely been better for all participants.

Horror

- The participants felt either nervous, normal, or happy/interested after reading this excerpt. One of the oldest participants (age 16) said that they felt interested and smiled after reading this excerpt; there must have been a wow or fascinating factor about the story idea that stuck with this participant.

- This participant rated a (5) before and a (6) after on the emotion scale. One of the youngest participants (age 11) had the next highest increase in 'positive' emotion, from a (5)-(6). Although they did say that they felt nervous after, the story still increased how positive they felt.

- The participants who were age 13 did not feel an increase on the scale; one of them even felt a decrease. An extroverted participant from this age group said that they felt normal to start with (6) and nervous afterwards (6). When asked, "What could have impacted your mood after?" the participant responded, "I think the creepiness of the book. Like, the scariest part is when no one believes the main character, you know?" ***Ambiverted participants were more disturbed by the paranormal themes, whereas extroverted participants were more concerned by the emphasis on loneliness and abandonment.*** The participant who had a decrease in positive emotion said that they felt normal before and after reading the excerpt: "After reading the horror story, I still felt normal but a little (and when I say a little I do mean very VERY little) on edge about hearing knocks on my wall." This participant rated their emotions a (9) before and an (8) after.

- Overall, this genre was only good for bibliotherapy when the reader enjoyed horror or unnatural stories; otherwise, it did not improve the participants' moods.

Coming of Age

- Most participants felt sad or annoyed after reading the story, as they felt bad for the protagonist. But some did say that it didn't affect them all that much; they went back to doing what they were before and kind of forgot about the story. One of the participants said that the story reminded them a lot of an experience they had too, so there was a personal connection that made them sadder thinking about a friend who also moved away. An extroverted individual

noted that they felt *annoyed* at the story, which is a more confident emotion than what the ambiverted individuals felt.

- Depending on what they were feeling before, most participants moved a point down on the scale after reading the excerpt—it made them feel more negative. But there was a participant who actually felt better after reading the excerpt, a young participant (age 11). They went from a (6) to a (7) after reading this excerpt.

- Overall, this genre had a slight negative effect on the participants. Coming-of-age stories have to do with growth and navigation of relationships. This means that the stories can often be quite sad. ***This genre can be used positively when trying to inspire readers to push through situations or to open opportunities for a reader to reflect on past situations.*** But when that is not the case, our experiment shows that this genre will leave a negative impact on the reader. The longer/stronger the story, the stronger the impact.

Dystopian Fiction

- This story made the participants feel inspired/curious/intrigued, all emotions that feel similar. It also made one participant feel annoyed, but this is because the participant does not like dystopian stories at all. But the majority of people do enjoy dystopian stories.

- The results that this genre got from extroverted participants were inspired and annoyed; straightforward emotions. It made the ambiverted participants curious/intrigued; more 'careful' approaches. The dystopian fiction story was inspiring to one of the participants because the protagonist doesn't give up, even with all the oppression around her. The story made a participant feel curious after reading; the participant was wondering what could have happened to the protagonist. The story made another participant feel intrigued, because this participant generally likes stories of this nature. Although it didn't have a significant impact on the participant, they felt slightly happier.

- The 13-year-old participants' mood went up 2 points on the scale after reading this excerpt.

And an older participant's mood stayed the same.

- Overall, this genre provided an opportunity for reflection. As did the coming-of-age genre, ***except this one was able to provide this without mostly any negative emotions.***

Adventure/Thriller

• This story did not affect the participants; they felt the same before and after reading this excerpt. Most said that it was not exciting—boring. An older participant said, “Didn't find it that exciting, was bored while reading it, not my thing.” A 13-year-old participant said that it gave them “Mini heart-attacks every couple of sentences,” but still rated their mood after reading as the same as before reading.

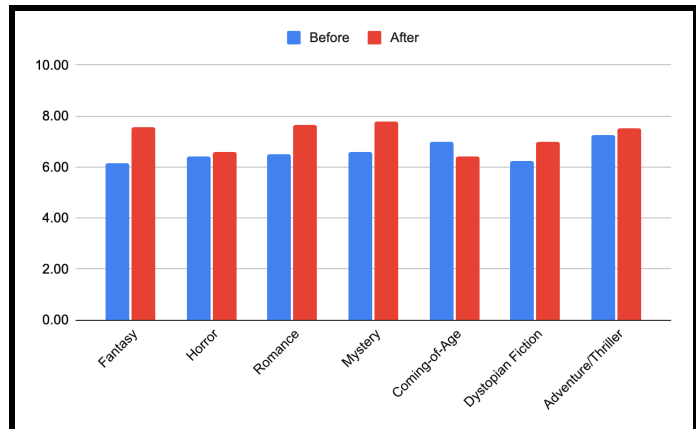
• ***A trend that we have noticed with this project is that younger participants feel more engaged and interested in stories that older participants don't as much.*** Had we experimented with even younger participants, the results would have likely been different. They would have had a higher positive rating after reading the excerpt.

• If the story had more description and suspense, the participants would probably have been more interested and would have felt happier/intrigued after reading the excerpt.

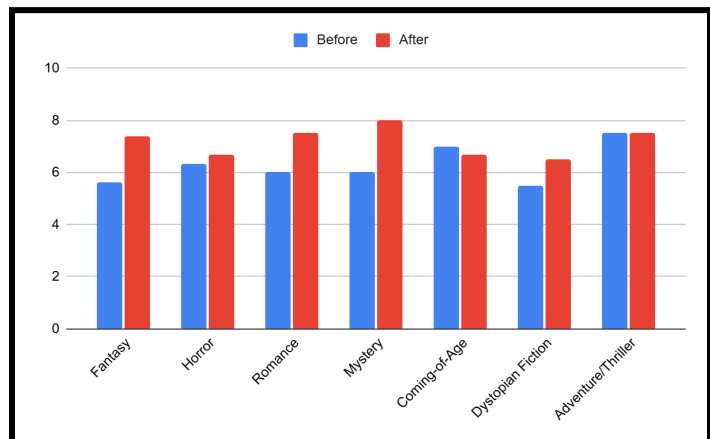
• Overall, this genre did not affect the participants. The story may have been at fault for this, and not the genre.

Analysis

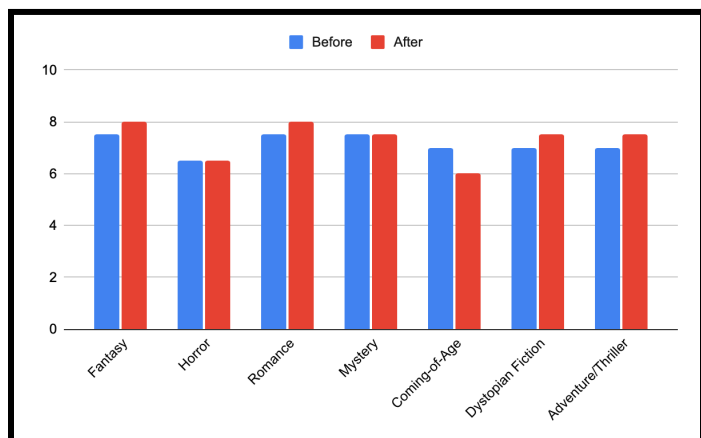
The graph to the right shows the overall results (across all personalities and ages). From this graph, we can conclude that the genre fantasy had the best results, followed by romance and mystery.



The graph to the right depicts the results for the ambivert personality. In our participants with the ambivert personality, we noticed that fantasy and romance had the best results.



The graph to the right depicts the results for the extrovert personality type. We noticed that fantasy, romance, dystopian fiction, and adventure/thriller had the same effects.

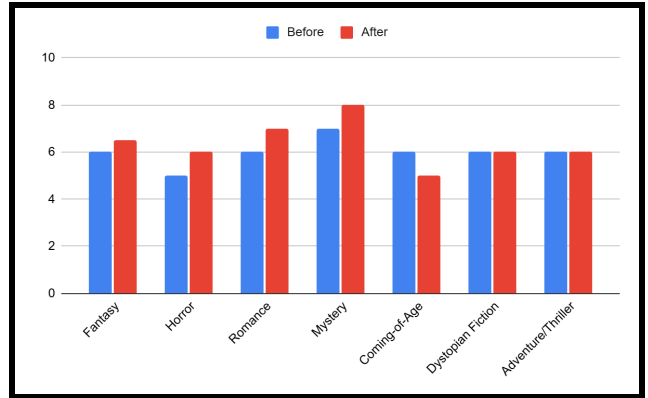


Although we didn't have any introverted participants, we can still compare our ambiverted and extroverted participants, as they had interesting results. Extroverted participants had more *direct* emotions toward the stories, whereas the ambiverted participants were more careful with their approaches. For example, an extroverted participant noted that they felt inspired by the dystopian fiction story, but an ambiverted participant noted that they felt intrigued and curious. Intrigued and curious are both emotions that increase thinking and carefulness.

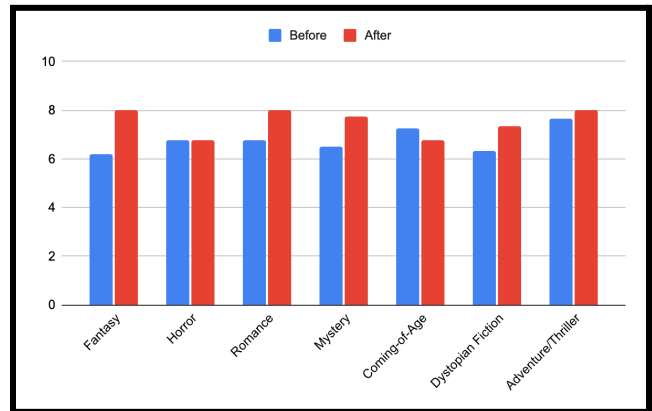
Romance stayed one of the top genres throughout both personalities, which could have been because of three reasons:

1. The storyline and plot were inspirational/motivational
 - a. One of the participants had noted that this genre motivated them to plan something for their 2-month anniversary with their girlfriend. Maybe the other participants also felt inspired in a sense.
2. Romance felt relatable
 - a. This study was conducted with teenagers, and it is a well-known fact that teenagers are highly likely to experience crushes. This short story could have felt relatable to some of the participants who read it, leading them to feel more happiness or another positive feeling.
3. Romance had a sweet and happy aspect, and the happy ending provided participants with security.
 - a. Security gives people hope and happiness, and makes a story more memorable.

This graph depicts the results of the middle-school participants. Note that fantasy, dystopian fiction, and romance caused the best results in students aged 10-13.



This graph shows the results for high school students (aged 14-17). Note that mystery, horror, and romance resulted in the best reactions.



These two graphs provide us with interesting information. Fantasy and dystopian fiction resulted in the best reactions in middle school students, followed by romance. High schoolers enjoyed mystery and horror the most. From these two graphs, we can conclude that younger students preferred genres built on imagination and creativity, whereas the high schoolers enjoyed reading mystery and horror, genres that aren't as unlikely to happen in the real world compared to the other two.

Another thing we noticed is that younger students had more improvements in their mood (for example, a sixth grader's mood jumped from a 3 to an 8!). This suggests that the older participants did not find the stories as intriguing as the younger participants. This is because older people need more stimulation, and simple things can tend to bore them. An example of this can be how adults enjoy reading the news, while children often do not.

Romance stayed popular in both groups, most likely due to the reasons discussed previously. Coming-of-age, interestingly, resulted in the most negative reactions in both groups. Typically, when professionals choose books for bibliotherapy, they choose books that will connect with the reader and inspire them, resulting in a happier mood. However, this genre appears to have done the opposite. Wondering why, we looked at the comments that our participants left, and here's one comment that stood out:

"The story reminds me a lot of an experience I had when going from grade 8 to 9, too, so I definitely had a more personal connection to it, so I felt a little sadder afterward because I thought about my friend who also moved away."

A few other comments had mentioned the same thing: feeling sad.

This could mean that stories that reminded readers of a personal connection might actually result in a worsened mood; however, it is important to note that in the story, the main character didn't necessarily have a "happy ending." Sure, the main character did go through some character development, but the most that the story mentioned was that he "moved forward," not necessarily what he did. If the story had elaborated more on what the main character did afterward, perhaps the results would have been different.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to find the best genres for bibliotherapy in different personality and age groups. Because it can be relatable, we hypothesized that coming-of-age would result in the most positive reactions from our participants. However, our results show that coming-of-age was one of the worst genres, while romance and fantasy were the best genres across all of the groups. We believe that this was because of the security found through the happy endings. We present our conclusions in the following groups:

Age-wise:

Generally, the younger participants had greater mood improvements than the older participants from the stories. This should be taken into account when mental health professionals are working with patients. When mental health professionals want their patients to feel positive emotions, they should choose genres built on imagination and creativity, such as fantasy and dystopian fiction, for younger age groups. Contrary to that, they should choose genres that appear to be more realistic, such as horror and mystery, for their older patients.

Personality-wise:

The coming-of-age genre can be used positively when trying to inspire ambiverted readers to push through difficult situations or to open opportunities for a reader to reflect on past situations. The dystopian genre provided an opportunity for reflection for both personality types. As did the coming-of-age genre, except this one was able to provide this without any negative emotions. Overall, this means that when bibliotherapists want their patients to reflect, both coming-of-age and dystopian fiction can support that by showcasing themes that mirror personality traits.

General:

If a patient is feeling a strong negative emotion, mental health professionals will find it useful to know that they will feel a strong positive emotion after reading the best genres for bibliotherapy (fantasy and romance).

Application

Throughout this study, we tested the effectiveness of bibliotherapy on different personality types and age ranges. In the past few decades, the rate of mental health issues in youth has significantly increased, and there are more therapy patients than ever. Using our results, mental health professionals can determine the best type of books for their patients, ultimately leading to a healthier lifestyle.

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Improvements

No Introverted Participants: We weren't able to determine if the results of bibliotherapy with different genres could *really* be affected by various personality types, because we only got a chance to experiment with ambiverted and extroverted personalities

Unequal Number of Participants From Various Groups: Due to trouble gathering more participants, and most participants who signed up not participating, we didn't have equal participants from the different groups (personality types and age groups). This could have impacted the results because, although there was still an average for all the results, in a smaller group, one person's individual ratings could have had a much greater effect on the results.

Only Testing With 8 Genres: There is a whole plethora of book genres available, but due to time constraints and the willingness of participants to read them all, we chose the 8 most popular and distinct genres. If we had those factors more available to us, we would have been able to determine the *best* of the best genres to use for bibliotherapy.

Non-Compliance With Instructions: Participants were instructed to read the short stories on separate days to make sure that the previous stories could not have affected the results. Some participants didn't fully comply, which might have affected their mood ratings.

Environmental Factors: The environment in which the participants read the stories could have affected their mood and emotions before, throughout, and after reading the stories.

If we were to conduct this study/experiment again in the future, the things we would change are:

- A larger number of participants with a wider variety of personality types and ages
- Testing with more book genres to better analyze if there are patterns in which genres work the best
- Keep the participants in a controlled environment
- Testing the personality types of participants ourselves (eliminates the possibility of participants lying/inaccurately guessing)

Further Questions/New Problems

1. What genres could most positively affect introverted individuals using bibliotherapy?
2. There are different types of bibliotherapy: clinical and developmental. Throughout this study, we used a mix, but more of **developmental** bibliotherapy. Would the results have differed if clinical bibliotherapy had been used, rather than developmental?
3. How would the results differ if we had younger/older participants?
4. What types of genres are best for patients suffering from various mental illnesses?
5. Most of our participants were female. How would the results have been different if there were male participants as well?
6. The stories we used for our project were generated using ChatGPT. If a human had authored it, would the results have differed?

7. In the future, how can AI be used to support other types of therapy?
8. Bibliotherapy is typically recommended for patients suffering from mild-moderate mental health issues. How can bibliotherapy support patients suffering from extreme cases?

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