Guided SSR before Self-Selected Reading

Beniko Mason

Abstract: The goal of the reading program is not only to help highly motivated students but also help every student reach the level where they can be an autonomous reader and thereby continue to make progress on their own after they leave the program. It has been reported that an initial pleasant experience, access to books, a time and place to read regularly, the freedom to choose one's own books, no tests, no workbook exercises, and no rewards for reading are the basic conditions for developing a long-term reading habit. In this paper I would like to suggest including a stage, Guided Self-Selected Reading, which prepares students to become free voluntary readers

Cho and Krashen (2016) have argued that the following factors help students develop a long-term pleasure reading habit

1. An initial pleasant reading experience.
2. Access to interesting reading material.
3. A time and place to read regularly.
4. The freedom to select one's own reading.
5. No tests, no workbook exercises, and no rewards for reading.

In this paper, I add practical suggestions and explain in some detail, procedures that have been shown to help readers follow the advice of Cho and Krashen (2016) and become long-term pleasure readers.

The goal of the reading program is not limited to highly motivated students, but to help every student increase their English competence through reading to the point where once they graduate or finish the program, they can continue to improve and grow on their own.

The Basics

The approach is based on the Comprehension Hypothesis, the core of current second language acquisition theory.

The program is based on the Reading Hypothesis, a sub-hypothesis of the Comprehension Hypothesis. The Reading Hypothesis claims that vocabulary and other aspects of language are acquired through the comprehension of texts, made possible due to context. This program neither deliberately teaches vocabulary nor rules of the language via direct instruction. Instead it relies on compelling comprehensible rich input through the reading of stories. (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Nagy, et. al., 1985; Elley, 1989, 1991, 1998; Lao & Krashen, 2014; Lee, 2001; Mason & Krashen, 2004;

Mason, et. al., 2009; Mason, 2013a, 2018; Smith, 2006). Research consistently confirms the following: More reading is associated with better reading, writing, spelling, more vocabulary, and grammar (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1985, 2004; Mason, 2004; Mason & Krashen, 1997a; Mason & Pendergast, 1991, 1997b; McQuillan & Krashen, 2008).

A major goal of the teacher is to help students find reading that is compelling; material usually in the form of books, that are so interesting that the reader, in a sense, "forgets" that he or she is reading in another language. The best way to make sure that this happens is to encourage self-selected reading.

Some additional explanation of self-selected reading is required: The teacher does not simply turn the students loose in the library but helps them develop the competence to select their own reading material.

GSSR = Guided Self-Selected Reading

I have found it very useful to begin self-selected reading with a "Guided Self-Selected Reading" (GSSR) stage. During this pre self-selected reading stage, the books are pre-selected by the teacher. Book selection by the teacher is based on experience knowing which books will be both interesting and comprehensible for students at the beginning level.

It has been my experience that many students do not know which books to select at which level when they are introduced to a reading program based on the Input Hypothesis. They need advice and guidance.

Reading extremely easy but interesting books at the beginning stage is the most neglected part of foreign and second language education. Well written, truly compelling, comprehensible stories for beginners to read is not available in many languages, and to my knowledge is rarely required, encouraged, or even mentioned.

Beginning GSSR

In a GSSR program, students start from the lowest level of graded readers. This ensures successful, stress-free reading on the very first day. The level that I use is the 200-headword level Penguin graded readers. I have observed many older students (junior high school to senior citizens) with little background in reading in English can read a graded reader at this level in 10 to 30 minutes in one sitting on the first day of the program. Those who can read a 200-headword level book in 10 minutes have a potential to progress rapidly, but those who struggle to read and spend 30 minutes to read one book at this level will progress more slowly and will need to be advised to read something simpler and shorter to begin with.

In my experience, the reading speed of beginning level high school, college, and adult EFL students in Japan, (those who have a potential to progress rapidly), is no more than 50 or 60 words per minute. Thus, the length of the story in a book for beginners cannot

be more than 600 to 700 words (e.g., Penguin 200-headowrd level), or at most 2,000 words (e.g., Heinemann or McMillan 600-headwod level) when they begin reading in English.

I suggest gathering several copies each of 40 different titles to begin GSSR for the first month in the first semester, and eventually assembling a collection of 100 to 200 titles or more and arranging them by the following difficulty levels: starter/beginner, elementary, intermediate, and advanced. I suggest this arrangement of the graded readers from different publishers due to the fact that not all publishers use the same terms or scale for their graded readers.

GSSR: Stages

In the first month, students read 20 books (almost one book a day), or 100 pages. In the second month, students read the same number of books, but the books are somewhat longer. In the third month, each book contains between 30 to 40 pages, and readers now read 100 pages per week. In the fourth week, readers continue to read books at the same level to get used to reading at this level. The goal is to read at least 1000 pages by the end of the first semester.

This sample schedule is for rapidly progressing students and not for students who have trouble reading books at the 200-headword level at the beginning of the semester.

Table 1: Guided Self-Selected Reading: A sample program for the first 15-week semester for rapidly progressing students

Month	Each book	Books/week	Pages/week	Books/month	Total pages
1st (4 weeks)	5 pages	5	25	20	100
2nd (4 weeks)	15 pages	5	75	20	300
3rd (4 weeks)	35 pages	3	105	12	420
4th (3 weeks)	35 pages	3	105	9	315
TOTAL (15 weeks)				61 books	1135

Note: In the first month (four weeks) students read five to six books per week. Each book is roughly five pages long. 200-headword Penguin Graded Readers (Starter Level) have about 15 pages per book, but 2/3 of a page is an illustration. Thus, I count it as a 5-page long book. When students read five or six of these graded readers, the number of pages that they read will be 25 to 30 pages per week, which is 20 to 24 books per month. The total number of pages they read in one semester will be between 1000 to 1200 pages.

Following the path presented in Table 1, it is anticipated that students will be able to read elementary level graded readers by the end of the first semester. After another semester, they will be able to read intermediate level graded readers, and after the third semester, upper level graded readers. By the end of the fourth semester, about 7% of the students will be able to read easier authentic books, the books written for native young adults (Mason & Pendergast, 1991, 1997). The length of the time it takes for beginners to reach authentic level books level has been verified again with three cases of adult readers. (Mason, 2011, 2013b, 2013c). Table 2 shows how far junior college students can achieve in a four-semester long reading program.

Table 2. What level books can you read comfortably now?

Level of books	Comfortable	Subtotal
American books for young adults*	7%	7%
2200 headword level graded readers	16%	23%
1600 headword level graded readers	53%	76%
1100 headword level graded readers	23%	99%
600 headword level graded readers	1%	100%

From: Mason & Pendergast, 1991, table 2, page 16.   N=226
*Books by Judy Blume, such as "The Tiger Eyes"

Students who progress more slowly of course need more time to get used to the lowest level graded readers, and they may not be able to reach the un-simplified or authentic level while they are in a 2-year reading program. However, if students continue with the program for one more year, there is a good chance that about two thirds of the students will reach the authentic level (Mason & Pendergast, 1991).

Table 3. Guided Self-Selected Reading: A sample program for a 15-week semester for students who progress slowly.

Month	Each book	Books/week	Pages/week	Books/month	Total pages
1st (4 weeks)	5 pages	5	25	20	100
2nd (4 weeks)	5 pages	5	25	20	100
3rd (4 weeks)	15 pages	5	75	20	300
4th (3 weeks)	15 pages	3	75	9	225
TOTAL (15 weeks)				69 books	725

These slow students benefit especially from listening to stories in class as listening to stories provides auditory comprehensible input and leads them to reading (Elley, 1989; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Mason & Pendergast, 1997).

Although the goal is 1000 pages per semester, not everyone reaches this goal. Some may read more, some reach the goal, but many of the students who progress slowly don't. Many have had negative experiences during their secondary school years, and already have considerable anxiety toward English. When they do not read at home, it is a good idea to give these students time to read in class and also have them listen to stories that the teacher tells (Mason, 2014).

When students read just 15 pages a day, this will result in 5475 pages read in one year. That is enough to increase their TOEIC score by roughly 150 points. (Mason, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Krashen & Mason, 2015; Mason & Krashen, 2017).

Examples of books that I recommend to my students in the first semester are listed in the appendix.

Selecting Books

Over the years, during my observations watching students select their books, I have noticed a common pattern. Students will typically choose books in the following manner: They look at the front cover; They read the title; They next look inside and see the font size of the letters; After this, they see how many pages there are, and they look at the pictures. Some of them start reading the first page, and then they decide which book to choose. They do all these things automatically and naturally. I do not have to teach them how to select books. While students are being guided from the starter books all the way to the upper level graded readers, they gradually acquire the skill of how to select books on their own.

Peer Recommendation

I have also noticed that students are both eager to tell other students about their reading and to recommend books to each other. Their friends are impressed with the reader's confident attitude, and they often check out the books their friends recommend. The chain of positive reading experiences develops slowly, and eventually contributes to students becoming readers in their second language.

The Teacher's Knowledge about Reading Materials

In order to arrange books into different piles for students to choose from, the teacher needs to know the content and the difficulty levels of graded readers. Just because the book is marked as "beginning" or "intermediate" does not mean it is easy, nor that it is at the right level for the student.

> "When someone becomes a teacher, she's like the matchmaker in Fiddler on the Roof. All year long she's trying to entice students to go out on dates with authors — that is, to pick up this book or that book and spend twenty minutes with the author, someone they've never met. The better she knows her students and authors or books, the more successful will be the "matchmaking." But the teacher (or librarian) who doesn't read much will fail for sure."
> Jim Trelease (1995); *The Read-Aloud Handbook*

Individual Guidance Using Information from the Students' Reading Journal

During the GSSR program for beginners, I have found that personal individual guidance is extremely helpful. An important source of information to help teachers guide students is the reading journal.

At the GSSR stage of the reading program, students record the following in their notebook. This should take no longer than five minutes.

1) The date they finished reading the book.
2) The title of the book.
3) The name of the publisher.
4) The level of the book according to the publisher.

5) The number of pages in the book excluding the pages for illustrations.
6) The time needed to finish reading the book.
7) A very brief summary of the story in L1.
8) A short reflection of the book in L1.
9) Any questions for the teacher in L1.
10) A mark that indicates the reader's impression on the book ★o×

The following sheet is pasted inside the front cover of the reading journal, so that the teacher can quickly see what students have read, how much they are reading, and make quick calculations about a student's reading rate.

No. ★o×	Date	Title	Publisher	Level	Minutes	Pages	Sub Total
1							
2							
3							
100							

Evaluation

GSSR takes the position that the affective filter plays an important role in subconscious acquisition. Corrective feedback and testing are reported to be not only ineffective (e.g., Robb, et. al., 1986) but may be harmful (Truscott, 1996), and progress in language acquisition is possible without them (Mason, 2004). When the teacher is familiar with the graded readers that she provides the students, and when she guides the students with the help of the students' reading logs, she can observe quite accurately whether students are progressing from the books that they enjoy reading.

Conclusion

I have found that when students experience and follow the recommendations explained in this Guided Self-Selected Reading program, it will guide them to progress from the easiest of graded readers to simple authentic English books in two years (Mason, 2011, 2013b, 2013c, 2018; Mason & Pendergast, 1991).

Some teachers have expressed concerns that it is difficult to get students to read 100 pages or more per week or 1000 pages per semester (e.g., Cobb, 2008). My colleagues explain that because their students are often busy with social activities and part-time jobs, they are tired, and when their students have some free time, students say they would rather relax and rest. But it has been shown that the alternative, direct teaching, has made students' life difficult and made them dislike reading in English even more (教育課程企画特別部会の資料, The Ministry of Education, 2015)
https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXLASDG17H0H_X10C15A3CC0000/)
With Guided Self-Selected Reading, the teacher eventually convinces the students that they are actually good at reading and that reading can be fun.

The teacher helps the students build their self-confidence by providing them with interesting books that they can read. Before both teacher and students realize it, students are hooked on books, and soon they become free voluntary readers.

> "The more you read, the better you get at it; the better you get at it, the more
> you like it; and the more you like it, the more you do it. And the more you read,
> the more you know; and the more you know, the smarter you grow."
> Jim Trelease (1995); *The Read-Aloud Handbook*

References
Cho, K. S., & Krashen, S. (2016). What does it take to develop a long-term pleasure reading habit? *Turkish Online Journal of English Language Teaching (TOJELT), 1*(1), 1-9.

Cobb, T. (2008). Commentary: response to McQuillan and Krashen (2008). *Language Learning and Technology, 12*(1), 109-114.

Elley, W. B. (1989). Vocabulary acquisition from listening to stories. *Reading Research Quarterly, 24*, 174-187.

Elley, W. B. (1991). Acquiring literacy in a second language: The effect of book-based programs. *Language Learning, 41,* 375-411.

Elley, W. B. (1998). *Raising literacy levels in third world countries: A method that works.* Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.

Elley, W. B., & Mangubhai, F. (1983). The impact of reading on second language learning. *Reading Research Quarterly, 19,* 53-67.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning.* Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practices in second language acquisition*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Krashen, S. (1984). *Writing: Research, theory, and application.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Krashen, S. (1985). *The input hypothesis: Issues and implications.* Culver City, CA: Language Education Associates.

Krashen, S. (2003). *Explorations in language acquisition and use: the Taipei lectures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Krashen, S. (2007). Extensive Reading in English as a foreign language by adolescents and young adults: A meta-analysis. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching (IJFLT), 3*(2), 23-29.

Krashen, S. (2011). *Free voluntary reading.* ABC-CLIO: Libraries Unlimited.

Krashen, S., & Mason, B. (2015). Can second language acquirers reach high levels of proficiency through self-selected reading? An attempt to confirm Nation's (2014) results. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 10*(2), 10-19.

Lao, C., & Krashen, S. (2014). Language acquisition without speaking and without

study. *Journal of Bilingual Education Research and Instruction 16*(1), 215-221.

Mason, B. (2011). Impressive gains on the TOEIC after one year of comprehensible input, with no output or grammar study. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 7*(1).

Mason, B. (2013a). Efficient use of literature in second language education: Free reading and listening to stories. In J. Brand & C. Lutge (Eds.), *Children's Literature in Second Language Education* (pp. 25-32). London: Continuum.

Mason, B. (2013b). The case of Mr. Kashihara: Another case of substantial gains in reading and listening without output or grammar study, *Shitennoji University (IBU) Journal, 56*, 417-428.

Mason, B. (2013c). Substantial gains in listening and reading ability in English as a second language from voluntary listening and reading in a 75 year old student. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 8*(1), 25-27.

Mason, B. (2018). A pure comprehension approach: More effective and efficient than eclectic second language teaching? *IBU Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 6*, 69-79.

Mason, B., & Krashen, S. (1997). Extensive reading in English as a foreign language. *System, 25*(1), 91-102.

Mason, B., & Krashen, S. (2004). Is form-focused vocabulary instruction worth while? *RELC Journal, 35*(2), 179-185.

Mason, B., & Krashen, S. (2017). Self-selected reading and TOEIC performance: Evidence from case histories. *Shitennoji Kiyo, 63*, 469-475.

Mason, B., & Pendergast, T. (1991). Does cloze exercise make pleasure reading more effective? *International Buddhist University Junior College Kiyo, 31,* 14-24.

Mason, B., & Pendergast, T. (1993). Taking a cloze look. In R. Day (Ed.), *New Ways in Teaching Reading* (pp. 16-17). Alexandria, Virginia: TESOL.

Mason, B., & Pendergast, T. (1997). Tadoku program at International Buddhist University. *Language Teacher, 21*(5), 27-29, 49.

Mason, B., Vanata, M., Yander, K., Borsch, R., & Krashen, S. (2009). The effects and efficiency of hearing stories on vocabulary acquisition by students of German as a second foreign language in Japan. *The Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching (IJELT), 5*(1), 1-14.

McQuillan, J., & Krashen, S. (2008). Commentary: Can free reading take you all the way? A response to Cobb (2007). *Language Learning & Technology*, *12*(1), 104–108.

Nagy, W. E., & Herman, P.A., & Anderson, R. C. (1985). Learning words from context. *Reading Research Quarterly, 20,* 232-253.

Robb, T., Ross, S., & Shortreed, I. (1986). Salience of feedback on error and its effect on EFL writing. TESOL Quarterly, 21(1), 83-95.

Smith, K. (2006). A comparison of "pure" extensive reading with intensive reading and extensive reading with supplementary activities. *The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching, 2*(2), 12-15.

Trelease, J. (1995). *The read-aloud handbook.* 4th ed. NY: Penguin Books.

Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language Learning, 46*(2), 327-369.

文科省(2015).平成２７年４月２８日付の教育課程企画特別部会の資料３−４．
（ http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/chukyo/chukyo3/053/siryo/__icsFiles/afieldfil
e/2015/05/25/1358061_03_04.pdf）。

Appendix
Examples of the books that I recommend in the first semester.
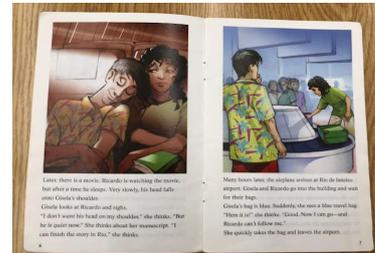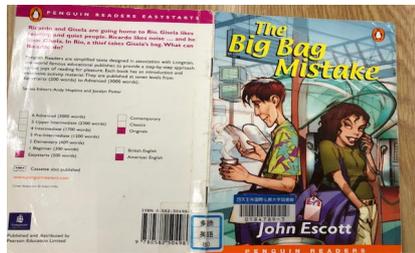
Penguin Graded Readers 200 headword level books (5 pages without pictures)
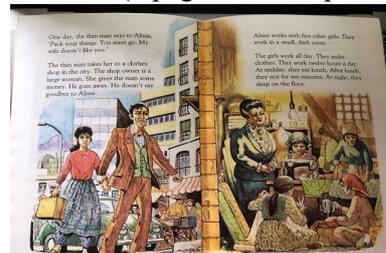
Macmillan Readers Starter Level 300 headword level
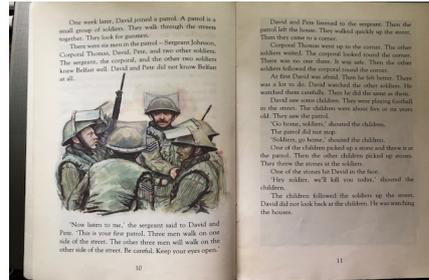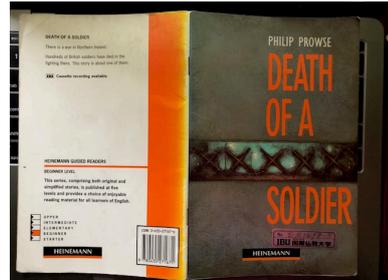
Heinemann Guided Readers 600 headword, Beginner Level (15 pages without pictures)
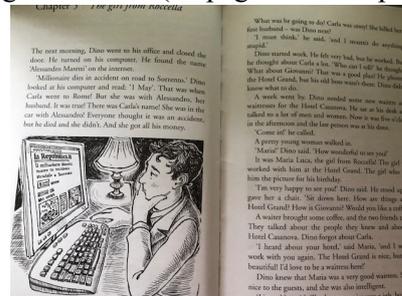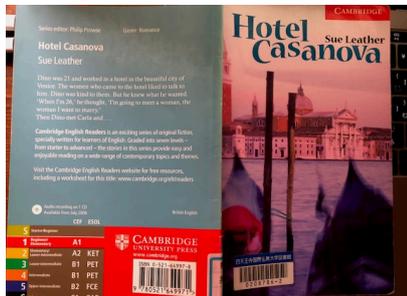
Cambridge English Readers Beginning/Elementary A1 Level (15 pages without pictures)
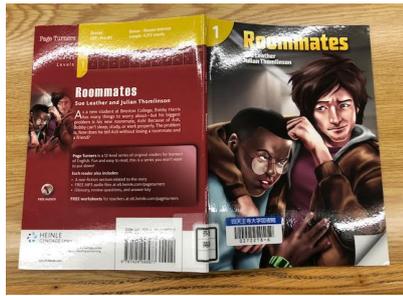
Heinle Cengage Learning. Starter 200 headword level (about 22 pages without illustrations)
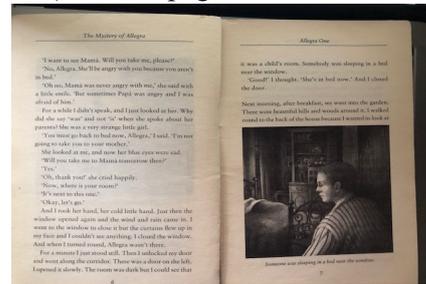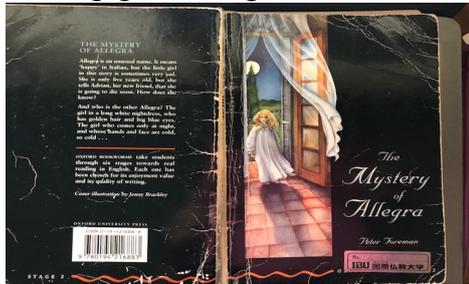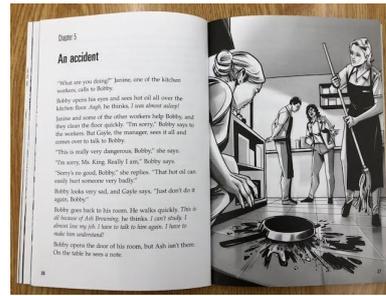

Oxford Bookworms Library. Stage 1, 400 headword level (about 30 pages)
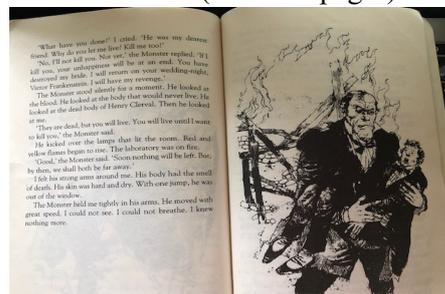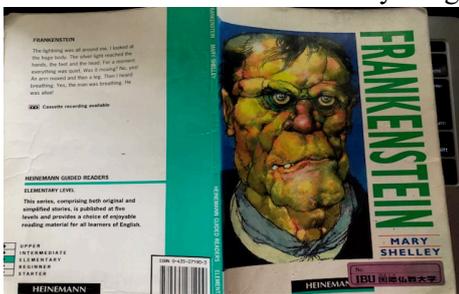
Heinemann Guided Readers Elementary Level 1100 headwords (about 40 pages)

The following books are easy authentic books. These books can be introduced to the students in their second semester while they are reading 1100 to 1600 headword level graded readers.
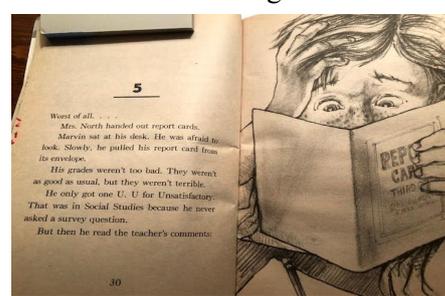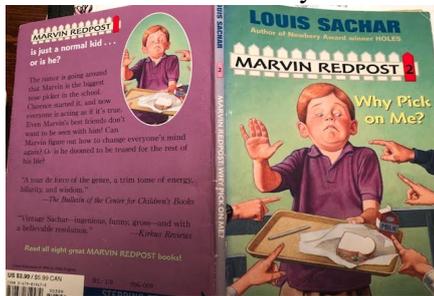
An authentic book example: Marvin Redpost Series (Grade 2-3 Reading Level)
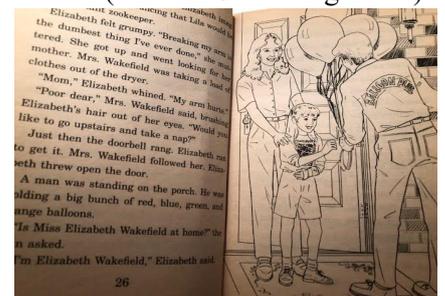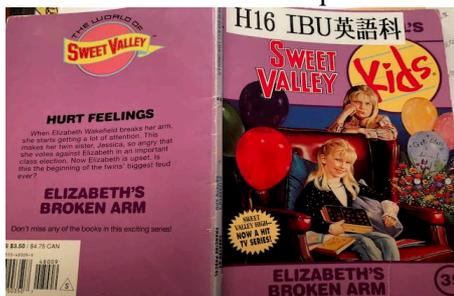
Another authentic book example: Sweet Valley Kids Series (Grade 2 to 3 Level)