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SETTING THE STAGE FOR LITERATURE CIRCLES

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the use of literature circles as meaningful tool in the reading classroom. This study took place in a suburban elementary school with approximately six hundred students. There were twenty-nine fifth grade students participating in this study. I used several methods to gather my data including teacher observations and reflections, surveys, a variety of interviewing methods, and student work. To analyze my data I created theme statements from my codes and bins, and reviewed my student feedback. The students started the school year learning the components of a good reader. We created a comfortable environment where we discussed our strengths and weaknesses as readers and how to collaborate with one another. We then read the same novel as a group modeling the different roles involved with a literature circle. After mastering the concepts of the roles, we began our first literature circle. The finding's suggests that taking the time to establish a comfortable reading environment leads to a successful literature circle. Students learn to communicate with each other. They are more organized and take on additional roles and responsibilities This, however, will only occur if a teacher leads by example before beginning the circles and once the circles are in motion the teacher must relinquish control and allow the students to become the teachers.

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Literature Review

What are literature circles?

Literature circles are student-led reading groups in which each student has an individual responsibility as well as a responsibility to the group to analyze and respond to a particular text. Groups are formed based on students' reading interests and the groups, not the teacher, select the book they would like to study (Daniels, 2002, p.6). Moen (2005) notes that, "Literature circles are student-centered and directed, but teacher-facilitated. In other words, the teacher sets the parameters of the overall literature circle experience, but the students run the operation of the discussion group" (p.52). The student-focused nature is what makes literature circles a unique reading experience that encourages students to take reading beyond the classroom. (Moen, 2005, p.52).

Why are literature circles important?

Literature circles afford students more choice in the classroom, which gives them a deeper reading experience than reading a pre-selected basal book. The choice that students are given through this level of learning empowers them because they feel that they have a say in not only the curriculum, but also their personal academic success. (Zieger, 2002, p.1). According to Zieger (2002), "Literature circles give them the opportunity to be challenged and engaged while holding them accountable for their reading" (p.1). Zieger goes on to explain that

literature circles build on student interest and utilize student-centered learning approaches to make reading fun. When working in a literature circle, students have the opportunity to analyze what they read, discuss their findings with their peers and share a general appreciation of the story with the group.

How are literature circles formed?

Harvey Daniels (2002), the leading proponent of literature circles, encourages teachers to select a minimum of three books of various levels and genres and introduce the choices to the students. Each child individually chooses the book that he or she is the most interested in reading. Students who share an interest in the same book form literature circle groups. These groups are often a mix of ability levels.

Based upon their selection, they are put into a group with four to seven other students who have chosen to read the same story. Fellow literacy educator Jan Zeiger (2002) states that because students are choosing books that interest them, they feel more engaged with the reading discussion and will stay with the story longer. “In addition to developing necessary reading and language skills, my students are also developing a love of literature,” (p.2).

As much as literature circles rely on flexibility, they also require a regular meeting schedule. “In order to work most effectively, literature circles must be regularly scheduled – not as an ‘occasional treat’, but continuously throughout the school year,” (Daniels, 2002, p.20).

Teachers should encourage freewheeling discussions as they help the students to feel more comfortable about expressing their ideas with their peers. Harvey Daniels adds that “Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations about books, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome,” (p.20).

What is the difference between a literature circle and traditional small group instruction?

“Tens of thousands of teachers are doing something they call ‘literature circles’. And many other teachers are using classroom activities that look very much the same, which they call ‘book clubs’ or ‘reading groups’. This means that now literally *millions* of students are involved in some kind of small, peer-led reading discussion group,” (Daniels, 2002, p.1). But although these other methods may share some similarities with literature circles, they fall short of the Harvey Daniels model for literature circles. Other methods may not allow for student choice or interest grouping, which are the key attributes that make literature circles stand alone when it comes to group reading instruction. Zeiger concurs that the strongest value of literature circles lies in student choice and adds, “My students are reading books that interest them, which makes them look forward to their meetings where they seem truly engaged as they discuss their reading selections” (p.2).

The fact that there are so many different names for small-grouped reading instruction may affect the validity of the research supporting literature circles. (Daniels, 2002, p.7). Researchers may be looking at a guided reading group as a literature circle and misconstruing that activity with a true literature circle. “Unfortunately these studies appear under so many different names (literature studies, book clubs, literature discussion groups, literature circles, cooperative book discussion groups) and often combine so many divergent ingredients (teacher control versus student autonomy, assigned versus chosen books) that one has to read very carefully” (Daniels, 2002, par.1). Clarke & Holwadel (2007) note that, “In 1994, Daniels published his first book about literature circles. Since this publication, the information on literature circles has grown as many teachers and researchers have seen these discussion groups as an important addition to a literacy curriculum,” (p.21).

It's not a perfect solution

From the research gathered, it may sound as though literature circles are the be-all, end-all option for reading instruction. It's important to note, however, that as with any new instructional method, the program will not solve all the problems in the classroom. According to Daniels (2002), when students are in literature circles, they learn skills incidentally by their group discussions and peer interactions. But when circle time is over, the students are ready for the teacher's instruction and guidance for reading skills (p.234). Upon implementation, the

difficulties that students have with reading will not be cured, but students are likely to show improvement because they have become motivated to learn and read with others. Even Daniels agrees that the results of success may not be visible in test scores, but the long-term benefits to this approach to literature may prove to be invaluable, adding, “Now there was a lot of good work going on in these schools, and it is never possible to tell exactly what treatments caused what gains. But the teachers were convinced: their literature circles were working, not just to help kids become readers, but also to prove they are readers on the mandated measures of proficiency” (par.2).

Standardized test scores aren't going to jump through the roof the day after this program is started in a classroom, but it could boost the confidence level of students and empower them to succeed and strive for academic excellence. (Daniels, 2002, p.3).

But for those who rely on the quantitative means to measure the success of a program, Harvey Daniels (2002) has also done research that suggests that literature circle have a direct link to augmenting test scores. After working with one group of teachers to implement his strategies in the classroom, Daniels study found that the students involved with the literature circles made gains on citywide test scores. Third graders improved by 14%, sixth graders by 9% and eighth graders increased their scores by 10 %. But the teachers noticed that it was more than test scores that had improved: the confidence level of students was raised. In

an interview with student who participated, 11-year- old Sarah explained, “A friend told me about this group and it sounded like fun. It’s better than reading on your own,” (Mallon, p.1).

The benefits of literature circles

Student Empowerment

One of the advantages of using literature circles over regular reading instruction is that the program is set up to empower children by involving them in the decision making process. (Blum, 2002, p.100). Blum (2002) explains that empowerment is the key to unlocking a student’s potential, because it allows the student to create and achieve their goals by understanding their strengths and limitations. Students who are empowered are not only active in decisions made about their education, they are also cognitively challenged (p.100). Literature circles are so powerful because they revolve around student choice, which gives each student a sense of personal investment in the lesson. Williams (2008) states, “Children need to know that they have some power over their education. When they are not given any choices, they certainly are not inspired to be proactive over their education. Children feel empowered if they can make choices...and that they feel that their opinion matters,” (p. 2-3).

Student centered learning

Literature circles are a great example of student centered learning because of the simple fact that students get to choose the books they’re most interested in

for every circle. Their choices shape their learning, and their involvement and leadership are what makes the lessons come alive. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) note that “When children share their personal responses and interpretations of a book with one another they are able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their world” (p.31). Within a literature circle, each student is encouraged to question what he or she reading and seek out the answers to his or her questions; the students, in essence, become the teachers and the teacher is merely an observer in the learning that takes place. Ziegler (2002) adds, “By providing them with student-centered reading instruction, I feel that I’m giving them (my students) the room they need to grow as readers and thinkers” (p.1).

Conversation

Literature circles help students to understand the importance of conversation and how they can use it to learn in a fun, authentic, meaningful way. (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996). Fountas and Pinnell (1996) explain that students bring their own experiences with them to share with the rest of the group, which means that each participant searches for different ways to interpret the same text. In a literature circle the traditional teacher role has changed. Literature circles are not based upon teacher and student conversations. (Blum, 2002, p.101). They force students to direct their own conversation about what’s going on in the story, almost as if they were personally involved with the text.

Collaboration

Collaboration helps to develop a more fruitful learning experience because students work for understanding rather than just memorizing and regurgitating the information. (Daniels, 2002) Each student works with his or her peers to understand what the book is about. Schmuck and Schmuck (2000) explain that, “literature circles help to develop mature, interdependent, productive groups who have clear expectations, shared leadership and responsibility and establish open channels of communication,” (reported in Daniels, p.35). Collaboration goes beyond the literature circle and regardless of ability level; it is a skill necessary for lifelong learning. (Daniels, 2002) Daniels (2002) adds, “Literature circles are a very well-structured activity, one that we would expect not only to be successful in accomplishing its goal – which is the clear and deep understanding of a book – but also to contribute to the general cohesiveness and productivity of the wider classroom community,” (p.36).

Inquiry Based Learning

According to Long (2003), inquiry based learning, when applied to literature circles, is the process that encourages students to use their imaginations to question, investigate, and interpret text in order to make meaning as well as a connection between the text and fellow group members (p.351). Literature circles force students to inquire about topics that are meaningful to them. All too often students in the intermediate levels read because they have to, or read material as

quickly as possible, retaining nothing. (Pitton, 2005) Secondary language arts education's goal is to get students interested in reading by finding appropriate books for them to enjoy (Pitton, 2005). Students who participate in literature circles are inspired by the fact that they are answering their own questions. "In literature circles I got to put in my ideas – that doesn't usually happen when the whole class is doing it (discussing)," said a student involved in the Pitton study (Pitton, 2005, p.5)

Motivates students to read outside of the classroom

Literature circles may rejuvenate a love of reading in students because they're not being forced to just read a book and answer questions. Instead, they pick interesting subjects, discuss the content with friends and really get into the story. "If intrinsically motivated to read on their own, children will sustain interest in reading and improve their reading abilities," (Williams, 2008, p.1).

Literature circles in action

Teacher and researcher H. Timothy Blum (2002) sought to determine how students' perceptions of their reading abilities were affected by the use of literature circles. Using literature circles as a differentiated approach to reading in an inclusive classroom, Blum hoped to find that literature circles could be used as an intervention or a remedial measure. Blum, using Harvey Daniels' methods and instructional practices, created a study to be executed in a multi-age inclusive classroom of eighth and ninth graders within two different literature circle groups,

based on students' book selection. Before the study began, students completed a survey about their perceptions of their own reading abilities. For the study, the chosen books were varied in ability level, but they all addressed similar social science themes. The teacher modeled literature circle roles and guided the students through several trial literature circles. Students completed the same survey about their perceptions of themselves as readers both before and after the literature circle intervention. The researchers also maintained anecdotal records and conducted student interviews throughout this process.

Blum (2002) reported that as students worked collaboratively with their peers; they began to build a greater understanding of collaboration and teamwork. The teacher found that the students in this class first identified that they had difficulties in several aspects of reading. After they were introduced to literature circles, all made some form of improvement when it came to their own perceptions of their reading skills. The students in the target group noted that they remembered more of what they read, and they could now explain what they read to others. They also noted that literature circles gave them the tools for success, (p.106). The study also found that students took more risks and communicated more easily with their group members. All the students claimed that literature circles helped them with self-management skills, but the students in the targeted group felt that their reading skills greatly improved due to the techniques learned in the literature circles. Blum (2002) concluded that literature circles were an

effective accommodation in an inclusive classroom for student achievement. He also noted that literature circles help students with learning disabilities increase their perceptions of their own reading abilities. The instructor felt that this success was established by the fact that all members in the classroom felt that their opinions were valued and that students' individual learning differences were encouraged.

The roles of a literature circle

A teacher's role

“The teacher's main job in literature circles is to *not teach*, at least in the traditional sense of the term,” (Daniels, 2002, p.23). The teacher needs to introduce the concept and then let the kids figure out the lesson as part of their circle group. Petrilak (2007) explains “The teacher is primarily a coordinator of time, space and activities, rather than a provider of information” (p.20). The teacher should be visible, and only become involved to settle disputes or answer questions. Daniels (2002) wants teachers to “join a group not as the teacher but as an equal, reading right along with kids a book they (act as if they) haven't previously read – and want to read,” (p.24).

A student's goals

Blum states, “The various roles that the students enact in literature circles encourage them to make predictions, construct visual images, create connections to personal experiences and other texts, monitor their reading and whether it

makes sense, solve word- and text- level problems in flexible ways, summarize as they go, argue with the author and evaluate content and writing style” (p.101).

The students are in charge of not only creating the questions for their group to answer, but also figuring out where to find the correct answer. This happens on a personal level, but students also must factor in the opinions of their group members, learning when to listen to others and when to assert their own opinion (Long and Grove, 2003). When student stop to listen to each other the possibilities for learning are endless.

Student roles

In every literature circle, each child has a role to help his or her group analyze and discuss the text. Daniels created eight roles, to be used in any combination, stating, “All of these roles are designed to create positive interdependence by giving group members clearly defined and interlocking but very open-ended tasks” (p.99). There are four basic roles:

- The first role is the connector, who is responsible for making connections between the text and the world around him or her. They will relate the text to themselves, their feelings, or even to other books/authors.
- The second role is the questioner, who analyzes and wonders about information found in the text. The questioner may clarify

something that was found in the text. He or she may also challenge or critique the text.

- The third role is the literary luminary or passage master. The student who has this role reflects on what was previously read and will direct the group's attention to something memorable- a quote, a paragraph, or even a particular word.
- The last basic role is the illustrator who has to draw a picture of what he or she visualized with the text. The student may draw anything they like (as long as it is appropriate for school) that relates to the novel that he or she is reading.

There are other roles that teachers may use in any combination. There is the summarizer, who is responsible for recording a brief summary of what was read in class. The researcher tries to uncover any background information on any topics that came up in the reading. The word wizard or vocabulary enricher looks for words that are unique or words that the circle does not understand. This student also looks for words that the author tends to repeat in the text. The scene setter keeps track of the events in the novel and where they are taking place. He or she will keep a record of this so that the group can easily go back and look to see where an event took place in the story.

To help students understand the different roles and their requirements, Daniels (2002) created role sheets, explaining, "Role sheets are designed to be

‘book club training wheels,’ a temporary, getting started tool, (p.99). These sheets are not worksheets; they do not need to be shared with the group word for word. They are to help the reader analyze the text and serve as a guide for literature circle discussions. Lloyd (2004) explains, “Through the process of asking genuine questions, literature (circle) discussions become more than an activity in which the reader is responsible for finding a predetermined meaning of text; the questions invite students to interpret text by illustrating the meaning and acknowledging the valuable insights each reader brings to the text,” (p.116).

Things to avoid and consider

Role sheet abuse

Role sheets are to be used as a learning tool to help introduce literature circles, but some teachers use the sheets to structure the whole program. (Daniels, 2002, p.13) Role sheets look similar to worksheets, however they are only intended to introduce the roles to the student, not to be completed and submitted daily. Daniels (2002) says that an alarming number of teachers are creating what he calls “role sheet backfire syndrome” (p.13) Role sheets, when used as worksheets, strip the students of their creativity, stripping them of their independence from the teacher. (See example role sheets- Appendix F) The goal is to use the role sheets until the students understand the responsibility of all the roles, and can analyze the text without the paper in front of them. Daniels quoted a fifth grader saying; “I think that we had better conversations without the sheets

in our hands. We were able to say what we were thinking right then instead of what we wrote when we thought of it as an assignment” (p.14).

Teacher joining circle

The teacher needs to know his or her role in a literature circle. Daniels points out “She (the teacher) knows that in running literature circles, the teacher’s main job is not to translate or interpret the books, but to facilitate the work of the groups,” (p.42). He goes on to explain, “Now it may happen (and often does) that the topics kids come up with match the ones the teacher would have asked. But ownership makes a big difference: this way students are in charge of their thinking and discussion” (p.22).

Add a little variety

In order for literature circles to stay fresh, students should be rotated through groups on a regular basis. Students need to be able to work with all members of the classroom, not just their friends. Students need to learn how to work together and to be responsible for their own learning. Literature circles are a great way to incorporate different levels of literature for readers of any skill. By selecting a book, students are choosing their appropriate leveled reading group. (Daniels, 2002, p.95). For a literature circle to be successful, the teacher should use a variety of genres to capture the attention of as many readers as possible. “You don’t have to be an expert in children’s or young adult literature to make some good book selections and get started with literature circles. The starting

point can always be children's books that you loved yourself," (Daniels, 2002, p.94).

Why literature circles?

It's a challenge to convince any teacher to change the way he or she runs a classroom. It's an even bigger problem to get that same teacher to relinquish control over a lesson and let the students work with each other to educate themselves. But it is this freedom, this independence and trust that will produce visible results in the classroom and encourage students to love literature. Fellow researcher Day states, "From this experience we realize that students are competent to discuss and teach one another. Because Jeni (teacher) lets go of control and gives them (students) an opportunity to make sense of the story through discussion, we are able to see what students are capable of doing themselves. We also become more aware of each student's growth and progress in reading," (Day, 2002, p.17). Literature circles are a student-centered way of learning and teaching that captures student interest and keeps the students engaged by incorporating variety and choice and the ability to meet and discuss with their peers on a regular basis. Kristen Overcash, a fifth grade teacher, told Harvey Daniels that the program has changed her students: "These kids are amazing! They really work at pulling everyone into the discussion, they're kind and thoughtful...I never have to get them back on task, they're so involved in

what they're doing...it just blows my mind that they can do so much when you just guide them and let them go," (p.54).

It is not enough to talk about literature circles and why they are an asset to the classroom – one must see it firsthand to understand their power. (Daniels, 2002, p.39) Daniels (2002) observed fifth graders who were participating in literature circles. "They have come to class with notes and drawings reflecting their ideas about the day's reading. They toss searching and open-ended questions into their groups, read aloud from favorite passages, stop to talk about difficult or powerful words. They are constantly flipping back through their books, using specific passages to prove points or settle disagreements. They laugh a lot, argue some, often touch one another to stress a point, and keep one eye on the clock to make sure they all get their fair share of 'air time'" (p.40-41).

Researcher Biography and Stance

Each year I spend the night before the first day of school lying wide-awake and thinking about the new year ahead. I wonder what will be the same and what will change. Will each of my new students like me? Will they be excited to find out that I am going to be their teacher? When the first day finally arrives, one of the most important things I share with my fifth grade students is a simple quote: “I can only teach; you have to decide to learn.” At first there is always silence in the room, but then one brave student will attempt to explain to the class what the statement means.

I believe the most important aspect of my job is to help my students become life long learners. Anyone can simply memorize facts or repeat phrases after the teacher; few take the time to stop and think about how what they learn in school creates who they are and what they believe in. At the age of ten, my students are already in the routine of waiting to be told what to do and how to do it. Unfortunately they are in for a rude awakening this year. I demand independence and constantly ask my students a wide array of questions: *Why are we learning this? How will this help us? Who is responsible for the assigned tasks?* By mid-year, trivial matters such as whether or not something will be graded and the length of the assignment are no longer of initial concern for most of the students.

When I was in elementary school things were not this way. We were given tasks to complete in a certain amount of time, and no one ever questioned why. We always seemed like we were jumping through hoops and not making any connections to our lives. We would memorize the facts and forget them as soon as the test was handed in. I was the student who did what I needed to do and that was all. The trivial matters were my first concern. I never stopped to think of why I had to do these things; I just knew that to get a good grade I had to do what I was told and memorize whatever my teacher presented to me.

When I began my college education things began to change. I realized that no longer could my education be about memorizing facts, or just doing what I had to do to get by. I realized that what I was learning not only affected my grade, but also my job and, as a consequence, all of the children that I was eventually going to instruct. Luckily for me, I had excellent teachers who not only taught me content, but also excitement for what I was learning. My education became my passion, and it was no longer merely a job. I could easily make real life connections since the majority of my assignments were authentic in nature. This simple change made everything that much easier for me.

When I became a teacher I utilized what I had learned from my own experiences. Today I teach my students the difference between memorizing and learning. They really seem to enjoy what they are learning when school is no longer a burden. I have realized the importance of choice in the classroom and

that teaching and assessing authentically make a dramatic difference. True education happens when students are actively involved and when they can personally relate to the material.

Unfortunately for all of us, teaching authentically is becoming challenging in our standards based world. It seems that school districts are looking for scientifically based programs, or any instrument that can guarantee that some sort of progress will be reached. As a teacher that realizes the importance of being held accountable for the education of my students, I have made significant adjustments to my curriculum. I have also come to the conclusion that no matter the age of students, they all need to be “hooked” into learning. We all need meaningful and engaging activities to discover our true potential. So I began my quest of searching for authentically engaging activity that will also help my students find success both in and out of the classroom.

When looking for new authentic activities to incorporate in my classroom, the first one that came to my mind was literature circles, which are the use of novels and small, student-run book clubs in the reading classroom used in place of a traditional basal reader. Literature circles teach students to use inquiry to respond to the text. Literature circles are based on choice. They center on student choice. Students are allowed to make choices about their reading selection based upon their reading interest and ability. The students join together in small groups to read and discuss their books. Students are taught seven different roles and will

rotate using all of the different “lenses” or roles when discussing the literature.

Literature circles are an elementary school’s version of Oprah’s Book Club.

I have been using a combination of both literature circles and the traditional reading series in my classroom for the past three years. Each year the differences in the students’ interest in their reading between the beginning and end of the year are outstanding. The majority of my students seem to prefer literature circles to the reading book. Not only do they seem to enjoy more of what they are reading, but they also choose harder vocabulary words to define and ask more challenging questions about the reading to one another. They also create projects that they organize and execute without any guidance from a book or a teacher. But the most dramatic difference I notice is that my students exhibit a much greater enjoyment for reading when they participate in literature circles.

Even though I have only been teaching a few years, I can see what a positive attitude towards reading can do for you. I know that for me personally I have always loved to read. I remember the first time I was “grounded.” I was in the third grade and I thought it was a perfectly good idea to go for a bike ride down to the corner store without informing anyone of my whereabouts. When I returned with my seven cents worth of candy, I was told to remain in the house for the rest of the day. After I spent a decent amount of time glaring through the window at my parents and sister, who were enjoying themselves outside on a beautiful summer day, I sulked around the house. I finally decided that I would try to read

the very first book in the *Boxcar Children* series. The series was based on orphan children that lived in an old train car and always seemed to stumble onto a mystery.

I realized that I was a fairly good reader and before I knew it I was “hooked.” I could not stop reading. I think I even had to take the book to the bathroom with me. I read for hours. At one point I remember putting the book on my lap just to be sure that I was still in my house and not in that boxcar from the story. My parents tell me that they called me to come outside several times and that I was released from my punishment, but I never heard them. I was addicted. I finished that book just before dinner, or perhaps I did not eat until I finished the book. I had to go to the library the next day and checked out all of the *Boxcar Children* books that I could find.

Years later, after one too many boring textbooks, my reading days were few and far between. I went to high school, and dating and working took precedence over books. I went to college and boycotted all books for pleasure after seeing the price tag of my required books for one semester. I almost finished college without reading a single book for pleasure, when I took a class children’s literature. I loved that class, the flame in me for reading returned and I once again had to be dragged to the dining hall because I would refuse to stop reading.

The summer in between college and starting my teaching career was eventful. Not only did I need to do some extensive clothes shopping to look professional,

but I also poured countless hours and money into making my classroom look perfect. I wanted to be the best, so I talked to as many teachers as I could and they all told me to become familiar with the books that my kids would like to read. This teaching gig sounded fantastic; people told me to read for my job. So I did, I read over fifty books. I was amazed at how much faster I could read books on a fifth grade level.

As my students and I got to know each other, I began to show off what I did over the summer. I could ask a student what he or she liked to do for fun and match them with a book or an author. The students began to ask me to pick out books for them to read for pleasure. A teacher making book suggestions to his or her students. What a *novel* idea!

It was at this point in my life that I realized how important reading is. If you want to be successful in life you have to be able to read. There is a big difference though between knowing how to read and loving to read. If you love to read then you read more frequently. The more often you read the better reader you are. The better reader you are the more successful you will be. Passion for reading opens many doors, and I want to see if literature circles hold the key. And so I will begin my journey to find the answer to one simple question: What are the effects of Literature Circles on student achievement for intermediate student?

Methodology

In order to answer my research question, “What are the effects of Literature Circles on student achievement for intermediate students?” I wanted to examine what happens to my students’ attitude and behavior towards reading before and after the introduction of literature circles. I intended to evaluate their work, survey their feelings about reading, as well as survey their parents’ observations of their son’s or daughter’s likes or dislikes towards reading.

Setting

I teach at a suburban elementary school in Northeastern Pennsylvania. My school is one of three elementary schools in the district. Of the three schools, my school has one of the highest averages when it comes to socio-economic status. There are approximately 600 students in my K-5 building. An overwhelming majority of the student population is Caucasian with a very small percent of African American, Hispanic, and Asian students in attendance. Most of my students come from wealthy settings where, in most cases, only one parent works.

I am one of six fifth grade teachers this year. I consider my classroom to be visually pleasing with bold and bright colors. I have 30 desks in my room that are grouped into four “pods.” There are blackboards on three sides of the room. I also have five computers which rarely all function at the same time. I do have

access to a wireless computer lab that has about 25 computers in it. My desk is in the front corner of the room next to the television.

The first few books that were utilized with the initial training of literature circles were:

DuPrau, J. (2003). *The City of Ember*. New York: Random House.

Konigsburg, E.L., (1967). *From the Mixed up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler*. New York: Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

Paterson, K. (1977). *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Scholastic.

Paulsen, G. (1996). *Brian's Winter*. New York: Scholastic.

Paulsen, G. (1987) *Hatchet*. New York: Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

Speare, E. (1983). *Sign of the Beaver*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers.

Participants

I have the largest homeroom with 29 students. Ten of these students are labeled gifted. The other nineteen students are considered to be at the top of their class. They all qualified to be in this homeroom by test scores and teacher recommendations from fourth grade. There are 16 girls and 13 boys in my room. Another class joined my homeroom for this first round of literature circles. I decided to start with the two homerooms because I wanted to teach the concepts behind literature circles to both homerooms at the same time. All students participated in the first two rounds of literature circles. There are 23 students in

the other classroom 11 girls and 12 boys. A moveable accordion style wall was opened during literature circles connecting the two rooms and the students could spread out across the two rooms. The other homeroom is a heterogeneously grouped class. For this study I will primarily be focusing on my 29 students.

Data Sources

After designing my data collection plan I submitted my proposal to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) of Moravian College. After a few minor revisions, the college officially accepted it and my research could begin (Appendix A). With this acceptance, I then sent my consent form for my principal's signature (Appendix B). He gave me the "green light" and I proceed to send home student and parent surveys. My students had to sign the form and their parent signed that they allow their child to participate in my study, and that they themselves would be participants as well. (Appendix C)

I collected my data using a variety of sources. I utilized student observations on a frequent basis. I also used student and parent surveys. I obtained constant student feedback, and I conducted informal interviews with some of my students. I observed the student behavior and recorded data during class time and would write more reflectively after school hours.

Field Log

When observing my students, I would record data inconspicuously in my field log. I based my field log upon some suggestions made by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (1997). I would collect raw data during class time by making quick comments on student's behavior, conversations, and interactions with each other. At the end of the school day I would reflect upon the reading class as a whole and convert the raw data into a reflective piece. My field log is considered my primary means of data collection Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2000) as well as Burnaford, Fisher, and Hobson (2001).

Surveys- Students and Parents

I had my students complete a survey before literature circles began (Appendix D). I wanted to know their feeling about reading, and the reading book from our current reading series. After the introduction of literature circles and their first experience of literature circles I gave a similar survey to the students again to make comparisons about my students feeling toward reading in and out of literature circles (Appendix E). I also had my parents complete a survey in the beginning of the year regarding their child's views on reading before the introduction of literature circles (Appendix F).

Interviews

I conducted several interviews with my students while literature circles were taking place. I wanted to have informal interviews with my students to

ensure that they were being honest with me. I would interview a whole literature circle group at one time. I would also interview one student at a time. I was sure to interview one student from each literature circle group. I also had some informal conversations with students at random both before and after literature circles.

Student Feedback

The majority of my data were collected by this method. I was constantly getting feedback from my students. I started gathering data in the beginning of the year before the beginning of literature circles. I then gathered more data during literature circles, and lastly after the conclusion of the first literature circle. I collected the data using several different methods. I would ask questions of my students verbally. I would also have them answer questions as individuals and as a literature circle group. I also had my students answer questions on post-it notes to help ensure honesty.

Trustworthiness Statement

As a teacher researcher, I made sure to have accurate and reliable data that were obtained in a trustworthy and ethical manner. I began my year by using the district's basal reading book to help me gather baseline data on my students' reading abilities as well as to have data for our standards based report card. I also handed out the Dibel (Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills) assessment to test their reading speed and accuracy. My students then completed a

survey about their feelings on reading before we began our work with literature circles. I also had the parents of my students fill out a similar survey on their child's views of reading when they are at home.

The first few days of school I took the opportunity to get to know my students as learners. I began reading our classroom read-aloud book, The City of Ember, by Jeanne DuPrau. While reading this book I would stop and ask the students questions and model some of the behaviors that good readers display. I had the students create their own questions and comments to discuss with the class. I kept record of this by having the students record their feelings and questions on post-it notes that I saved.

Throughout my study I continuously gathered anecdotal records on my students while they were participating in both literature circles and other reading activities to see if there were any comparisons to be made. These notes are incorporated in my study through my field log notes.

I continued to have my students complete the district assessments that were linked to the reading series. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with both my students and their parents throughout the entire process. By using a variety of sources I was able to triangulate my data. Burnaford, Fischer, and Hobson (2001) state, "triangulation is a term used for the conscious intersecting of multiple methods for data collection" (p. 70).

All data that I collected remained in my possession at all times. I kept the data in a locked cabinet in my home when I was not analyzing the data. All students were assigned a pseudonym. The lists of pseudonyms were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home, not my classroom. All student work had their names removed and replaced with pseudonyms by myself at my home. The original documents were returned to the students without the pseudonyms. The anecdotal records that I took while in the classroom were identified only by their pseudonym. Minor details of several assignments were changed to protect my students' identities.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Refusal to participate involved no penalty or loss of benefit to my students. All of the assignments were required of my students; however my students and their parents could decide whether or not to allow me to use the information for the purposes of this study. I reminded my students throughout the study that they could remove themselves from the study at any time without any penalties. To participate in this study, my students and their parents were told in both verbal explanation and through the consent letter that both had to sign.

Potential Bias

Before I began my study I identified some biases that I felt could affect my study

- All student enjoy authentic assessment
- Most students do not enjoy reading at this age
- Literature circles are beneficial to all types of learners

This Year's Story

Setting the Scene

Play takes place in a suburban elementary school. The majority of the scenes take place in the classroom 308. In this room there are twenty nine student desks, twenty nine student chairs, one teacher desk, a barely used teacher chair, random paper and pencils on the floor at all times.

The Self-Described List of Characters

Mrs. Trach- a creative teacher with a contagious excitement for learning; keeps kids on their toes with sarcasm, spontaneity and weird sense of humor.

Ashley- a talkative writer who is a quick reader

Lil Wayne- chooses when to perform, quiet when isolated from pals

Sapphire- a kitty-loving girl with a dry sense of humor and a need for perfection

Marie- a smiling reader that is quiet as a mouse

Jose- talks too much, overly confident, and has a loud and booming voice that easily carries throughout the classroom

Bob- a shy guy that is quick to judge, a little on the jumpy side

J-Mysta- quirky kid who enjoys sharing stories and writing with expression

Resses- athletic loves laughing and talking, energetic and a little crazy at times with a love of pasta

April- a tiny little dancer with lots of energy, especially when it comes to talking

Jane- an eclectic artist with a passion for literature, devours books for a living

Jorge- a sarcastic individual who is quick with an opinion and likes to talk with his hands

BingBong- a kooky girl that is very creative especially with a pen

Jay- a funny helpful worker who is an overall nice guy

Seneca- a lover of reading who occasionally forgets to come back to reality

KitKat- energetic and likes to have a good time

Rocori- boy who is on the bossy side enjoys being the first one finished

Snickers- girl who enjoys a good giggle with friends and sometimes enjoys a good book

Avi- a natural born leader at the young age of eleven who has a passion for reading

Ramona- a girly- girl who is creative yet picky who especially likes to read and write

Akon- an intelligent guy who performs only when necessary

M&M- always has something to say tries to hide the perfectionist in him

Aubrey- a huge fan of laughing who has a flare for the dramatics

Cow- good student who likes to help others understand topics

Angela- a perfectionist who enjoys working with other dedicated students

Alexandra- a unique blend of maniacal, sarcastic, and fun (goat) loving girl

EagleFan- a creative learner who thinks that reading is just ok

Scaler- obsessed about books disguises a happy face with a mopey face

Skittles- a mysteriously quite girl who is not all that into reading

Seth- the next 'Dr.Phil' enjoys solving problems, smart but sometimes does not work well with others

Props

Elementary classroom

Literature circle folders

29 student desks

Literature circle notebooks

29 student chairs

Pencils

1 teacher desk and chair

Post it Notes

Books:

DuPrau, J. (2003). *The City of Ember*. New York: Random House.

Konigsburg, E.L., (1967). *From the Mixed up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler*. New York: Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

Paterson, K. (1977). *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: Scholastic.

Paulsen, G. (1996). *Brian's Winter*. New York: Scholastic.

Paulsen, G. (1987) *Hatchet*. New York: Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division.

Speare, E. (1983). *Sign of the Beaver*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers.

Act One

Scene 1- The first day

(Late August, the beginning of the school year. Students and teacher are meeting for the first time. Students seated in desks, teacher pacing.)

Mrs. Trach: Good Morning! I would like to welcome you to fifth grade. I will be your teacher this year. This year will be very exciting and different for all of us. First of all if you look around the room you will notice there are a lot of you, in fact, your class is the largest homeroom in the whole school. So, that is one impressive fact about being in this homeroom.

Students: (few cheers)

Mrs. Trach: Who knows something about me?

Seneca: You used to be Miss Huth and then you got married last year.

Mrs. Trach: Correct! I will answer to Miss Huth, Mrs. Trach and my personal favorite, Mrs. Huth, which is my mother's name. But please do not call me Mr. Trach. What else do you know?

Students: (giggles)

BingBong: You had a baby.

Mrs. Trach: Correct again. I had a baby boy on July 5th, which make me a working mom, so sometimes I will have crazy stories about him and my life.

Jose: My brother had you as a teacher and he said you were pretty cool.

Mrs. Trach: I paid your brother to say that.

Students: (Laugh.... Ice seems to be breaking)

Mrs. Trach: But that reminds me of our first vocabulary lesson of the year. Are you ready? Who knows what the word sarcastic means?

Akon: It means to say something in a mean way.

Mrs. Trach: Well... sort of. It means to say something in a funny way or not exactly in a serious way. For example when Jose mentioned his brother, I said that I paid him. Do you think I really paid him? No, I did not I was joking or being sarcastic. I use sarcasm to be silly but I also use sarcasm in here to get my point across without yelling. So, if I offend you or you think I am being mean to you, please just ask or tell me.

Students: (nodding)

Mrs. Trach: Well it is pretty obvious that you know a lot about me. Some of your faces look familiar, and some do not look as familiar. Either way, here is my deal. I do not know anything about you. You all have a clean slate with me. You have a chance to be whatever type of student you want to be, regardless of how you were last year. Here is your first homework assignment: tonight figure out what you want me to know about you. Look at the time, off to gym I will be here when you get back!

In the first few days of school I learned a lot about the students in my classroom. There were twenty-nine students who all had some similarities. They all were very intelligent. They all had to meet the same qualifications to be placed

in my homeroom. They either had a gifted individualized education plan (GIEP) or they were the top scoring fourth grade students in the previous school year. This was a new idea of my principals to place all of the top students in one homeroom and heterogeneously group all of the other students in the other five fifth grade homerooms. In retrospect, I believe my principal realized that this grouping was not his best idea.

My students had similarities, but they were as different as night and day. Some students were placed in my class because of natural talents and have effortlessly skated through previous school years. Other students were placed in my room because of their work ethic and their tendencies to be perfectionists. Lastly, some students were put in my room due to parental prodding and encouragement for their child to be *the best* rather than to be his or her *personal* best. Despite their differences, most of my students had a passion for learning.

The students in my room grew to realize that they were all placed in my room for a reason. They quickly developed inflated egos due to their grouping. They would feed off of each other. They wanted to be the best. If they could not be the best, they wanted to make a name for themselves such as the smartest, the funniest, or the richest. As a teacher I realized that I had my work cut out for me this year. I had to teach and challenge these students who sometimes tried to point out that they knew more than me. We spent hours discussing how to treat others and what it means to be respectful. The hardest task for my students is how to

work in a group. We eventually came to a mutual understanding of each other in our classroom, however, these students made quite a name for themselves in their special area classes, at lunch and even recess. These kids needed a reality check on how to deal with others and how to respect and work with other students and adults. This was a year filled with education and learning of topics that yet to be linked to any curriculum or standard. We learned about life.

Scene 2- Introduction of the Read-Aloud

(The beginning of the school year. Students and teacher are meeting again after gym class. After dealing with the first day of school paperwork the teacher sits and looks at the class with a novel in her hands.)

Mrs. Trach: Ok, we have some time before lunch and I would like to introduce the book that I will be reading to you as our first read aloud. Has anyone ever heard of *The City of Embers*?

Students: (mumbled no's and shaking of heads)

Mrs. Trach: Well today is your lucky day. This is an awesome book. Jeanne DuPrau wrote this book. It is a little different than most. This was her first children's book. She then wrote a sequel to it- *The People of Sparks*, and then she wrote a prequel to *Embers- The Prophet of Yonwood*.

Jay: What is a seacall and a precall?

Mrs. Trach: A sequel is a continuation of the story, so the *City of Ember* took place first and the *People of Sparks* continued where that story stops. A prequel is

a story that took place before, so in this case *The Prophet of Yonwood* happened before the *City of Ember*.

Jay: Ok, I get it now.

Mrs. Trach: Normally I would let you vote on the book I read, but there is a catch with this book. *The City of Embers* was made into a movie. It is due to come out in the theaters October 10th.

Reeses: Can we go?

Jorge: Yeah can we get out of school and go to the movies?

Mrs. Trach: Well, no, I will not take you out of school but I have been known to meet my class at the theaters at night.

Jorge: Seriously?

Mrs. Trach: Seriously.

Mrs. Trach: Without further adieu I present *The City of Ember*.

To start the school year, I decided to read the novel *The City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau. The book was made into a movie, which was due in the theaters on October 10th. *Embers* is an excellent story that does not really tell the reader where it is taking place until the very end of the story, which helps me to keep the students interest. As I read, the students appear to be captivated. I began reading on the first day of school. The next morning, one of my students came in and announced “I was talking to my mom about Ember and we think that the story is

taking place in Alaska because there is not a lot of sunlight there.” As the rest of the class responded, I excitedly picked up my pencil to record my first piece of data. My student was so interested in just the first few pages of my book that she went home and discussed it with her family. This is what I want to see all of the time from my students.

On the third day of school, my students had library. I suppose I should have warned the librarian. My kids fought over who could check out *The City of Embers*. The librarian also informed me that there are six kids that have the book on reserve as well. My classroom library was wiped clean of any additional copies of the book. By day four, three of my students went and purchased the book on their own, and followed along with me as I read.

Day five began with the comment “I talked to my brother and he said that he read this story with Mr. Hahn. He told me what happened, but I don’t know if I believe him.” I also spotted several copies of the book joining my students at the lunch tables in the cafeteria.

Now, I know that this is a good book, but what is making my students agree so wholeheartedly with me? This is what I hope to discover. I also want to teach my students how to pick books on their own that they can be this excited about. When you enjoy what you are reading, you almost forget that you are reading. My students would rather listen to me read this book than most other things in our classroom. For the ultimate test I should test my students by asking

if they would rather have me read or go outside on a gorgeous September afternoon.

Scene 3- The Reading Book

(The third week of school. The teacher is about to introduce the reading book to her classroom. The reading book has been used almost exclusively in grades one through four.)

Mrs. Trach: We are going to be doing a lot of different things in reading, some old some new. Today we are going to read our first story in the reading book.

Students: (groan)

Mrs. Trach: What was that all about?

Jorge: Do we have to?

Mrs. Trach: Yes, we do. The standards based report card requires me to use two of the stories from the book as part of your report card. So every marking period we will do at least two stories.

Ramona: That's not so bad.

Mrs. Trach: I would like to hear your thoughts on the reading book. Does anyone want to tell us his or her thoughts? Maybe some of you feel the same way.

Sapphire: I don't like the reading book because I think that regular books are a lot more interesting than the reading book.

BingBong: I do not like the reading book. You only get a little of the story and the stories are weird and don't make sense.

Seneca: I kind of like the reading book. I kinda like it because it inspires me to read new books.

Rocori: I don't like the reading book because the stories are boring and you always have to read together which is way too slow for me.

Akon: I strongly dislike the reading book because it's only two chapters max in a story. Also because you can understand a whole book better. Besides the books are sometimes too easy.

M&M: I hate the reading book because it only has a little part of the story and I like focusing on one book rather than a lot of little stories and the stories are not good at all.

Mrs. Trach: Well, I am sorry to hear that we really do not like the reading book all that much. I hope that you consider yourselves to be "readers" just not fans of the reading book.

On September 8, 2008, I introduced the reading book for the first time. My students overall were not happy to see its return. By the classroom discussion that we had about the reading book, I discovered that they not only do not like the reading book, but they also do not like the way reading has been taught. Several of my students mentioned that they did not like reading as a class because some readers were too slow. A majority of my students referred to the fact that the

reading book was “too easy.” They also complained that the stories were only tiny pieces of a real novel. But some students with this mentioned that they enjoy getting a small piece of the story, because if they like it, they go and find the rest of the story. A few students even mentioned that the skills that are being taught in the reading book are too easy.

I already seemed to have made an initial connection that my slower readers like the reading book because of its brevity and pictures. This is an interesting case to keep my eye on, could it be that the stronger the reader the less they like the reading book and vice versa?

I had the students read on their own at first due to hearing their complaints about reading as a whole group. They seemed to enjoy this, and quickly completed the task. I had a student, Skittles, who needed additional time to finish the story. Oddly enough, she is the only student that said, “I like the reading book because they are short stories and have some pictures.” She also had the lowest score on the DIBELS test.

Scene 4- The Fluency Talk

(Early one September morning, the teacher is about to give the district required DIBEL Assessment.)

Mrs. Trach: Today I will start Dibelng. Who remembers what that is?

Cow: It’s the reading test we have to take a couple of times a year.

Mrs. Trach: Good! What else do we know?

J-Mysta: We have to read three stories to you.

Mrs. Trach: Excellent! Now, do you know what I am looking for?

Angela: How fast we read?

Mrs. Trach: Right, I am looking to see your reading fluency. Some of you may be fast readers, and some of you may not be as fast. Now as you read with me, I will be giving you a number, the words you read per minute. What do you think you should do for this type of test?

Rocori: Read as fast as I can. Since I do normally read very fast this will be no problem for me.

Jose: I am a terrible reader; I am so slow... and dumb.

Mrs. Trach: Ahhhhh, what a teachable moment. How many of you think of yourselves as fast readers?

Students: (Most have hands in the air.)

Mrs. Trach: Now those of you with your hands in the air, how often do you skip over a word that you don't know, or have a hard time remembering every little detail?

Students: (Same hands in the air)

Mrs. Trach: Just what I suspected. Now those of you who consider yourself to be 'slower' readers, do you remember what you read, and stop and try to figure out those tricky words:

Students: (Some students nodding.)

Mrs. Trach: Well guess what. Fast readers read a lot of words, but forget what they read; and slower readers take a little longer, but remember the information much better. I am going to teach you what type of reader you are. I think that it is important for you to know yourself as a reader so you know how to help yourself.

Students: (Puzzled yet captivated audience.)

I asked my students if they knew what fluency was. Their answer: no. I talked to them about what fluency was and that the DIBEL assessment measures how many words that you can read in one minute. Since they had just taking the beginning of the year assessment, they had an idea of how many words they can read in one minute. Their assumption was that the faster you could read the better reader you are. What they failed to realize was that most of them were speed-reading and had a hard time talking about what they read. I pointed out that slower readers sometimes had easier time recalling information because they take their time when they read. We also talked about the differences between reading out loud versus silently. We did one-minute reads using the reading books so that I could show the students the discrepancies between the two.

My hope is that if they know what type of reader they are, they will be able to talk to their literature circle group about themselves as readers. The more you know yourself as a learner, you feel empowered. When you feel empowered, you participate more in the activity. My students are competitive; they enjoyed

knowing how fast they can read. I am cautious though because they were very quick to share their “speed” with other students, to see who was faster.

Scene 5- Hatchet (Introduction of Roles)

(Scene opens in early October teacher is getting the literature circles ‘rolling.’ This scene takes place over two weeks. The teacher will introduce the seven different roles one a time. She will be doing this by having the entire group read the same novel, *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen.)

Before beginning our first official literature circle, I always start with the entire class reading the same novel. This way, the literature stays the same and we can focus on the changing roles. Everyday we read a few chapters and then stop to discuss the role that they will complete that night for homework. We read the role instruction sheet together (Appendix F.) I summarize the role for them and give examples. Students ask questions and we discuss any concerns. The next day, we start with going over the role sheet from the night before. It is hard to read all of the student responses. The students do not seem to get into filling out the role sheets because they view it as just another work sheet. The following is the discussion we had about each role.

Summarizer

Mrs. Trach: Today your job is to summarize what we read in class. You will begin the literature circle discussion tomorrow with your summary. Your summary does not need to be long, but make sure you include the key facts that we read. The last thing that you will have to complete is a connection that you made to what we read today.

Role- Summarizer

Positive Student Remarks

- It made you understand the tragedy because you can use your own words

Negative Student Remarks

- It's too hard
- I summarize all the time
- The summary was ok, but I do not think it really helped anyone with anything.

Student Examples

- Brian was going to meet his dad in Canada because his parents were divorced. His mother gave him a hatchet to take, and when he was on his way to Canada, the pilot driving the plane had a heart attack.
- Brian's family was split and he is only allowed to be with his father in the summer. His mom bought him a hatchet and on the plane to his dad who is in Canada, his pilot has a heart attack.
- A boy whose parents divorce gets to spend his summer with his dad. On his way the pilot has a heart attack. The boy has to figure out how to land or save himself.

Figure 1. Students' thoughts and questions on Summarizer role.

Discussion Director

Mrs. Trach: The job today is the discussion director. For this role you are acting as the teacher. It is your responsibility to come up with thought provoking questions. You want to include at least five thick questions. Who knows the difference between thick and thin questions?

Thick- you cannot find the answer in the book, you have to think about the question before you answer, you can have several correct answers sometimes, and there may not be a 'right' answer.

Thin- these answers come right from the book no real thinking is involved. "What page does the plane crash," is a great example of a thin question.

The questions should lead into a discussion; it is ok if your group members do not agree with you. Remember- no one is right or wrong. Your questions should just get people thinking.

Role- Discussion Director

Positive Student Remarks

- I got to be the one asking questions
- I had a lot of questions
- I got to re-read the chapters
- Starting a discussion is easy with a good book- *Hatchet* was a good one
- I enjoy being in charge, I got to be the teacher
- Made me think
- I could hear other peoples thoughts

Negative Student Remarks

- I did not get it
- You have to think too much
- I don't like discussing, just reading please

Student Examples

- Did the chapter remind you of anything that happened lately?
- Do you think Brian will survive the crash?
- What do you think was going through Brian's head?
- What do you think the 'secret' is?

Figure 2. Students' thoughts and questions on Discussion Director role.

Investigator

Mrs. Trach: What is an investigator? Does anyone watch a television show with an investigator? Your job tonight is to find some additional information about what we read today. Think about something that you were wondering about and find some extra details about it. Were you wondering what “fool birds” are in the book, or what type of berries Brian was really eating? What is a bush plane? You may go on the Internet and find details, pictures, or any facts that caught your attention in the book. This is not a research report, just a fun way to find out a little more information on what we are reading.

Role- Investigator

Positive Student Remarks

- I would never think of looking at pictures-fun!
- I liked using the computer
- I am able to understand the story more
- Like answering my own questions

Negative Student Remarks

- I wanted to write, but I couldn't
- I hate looking things up
- Researching is overdone

Student Examples

- Students would bring in picture of objects in the story that they either did not understand or wanted more information on.

Figure 3. Students' thoughts and questions on Investigator role.

Mrs. Trach: Who knows what an illustrator does? All you have to do for tonight's homework is to think about today's reading in your mind and draw whatever pictures you think about. You do not have to draw a picture for each chapter we read, nor do you have to include all of what we read in your picture. You are remembering something about what we read today and drawing it. If you want to color it that's great, but just make sure you can talk about what you drew.

Role- Illustrator

Positive Student Remarks

- Break from writing all of the time
- I love to imagine when I read

Negative Student Remarks

- Not good at art

Student Examples

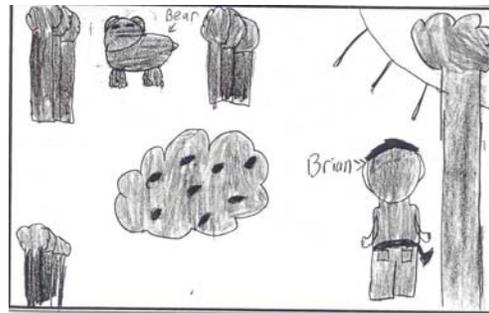
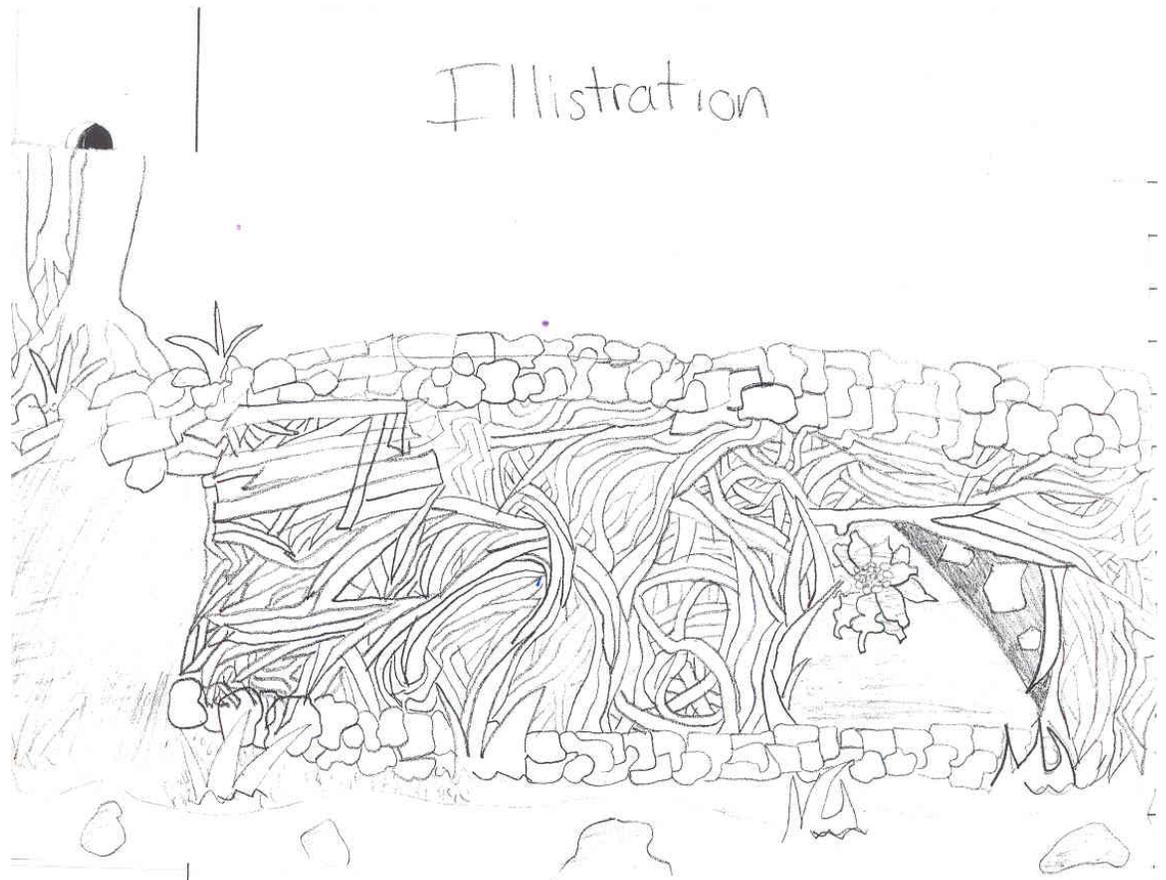


Figure 4. Students' remarks and BingBong's illustration of the beginning of the story *Hatchet*.



I had trouble visualizing Brian's new "home." So I read the descriptive pages and got an image somewhat like this. But I don't understand why his hatchet would have made sparks when they said he decided to close off the cave like this except leave a small opening for a door so he started gathering sticks and twigs.

*Figure 5. Jane's illustration of the beginning of the story *Hatchet*. She also went on to elaborate on her drawing.*

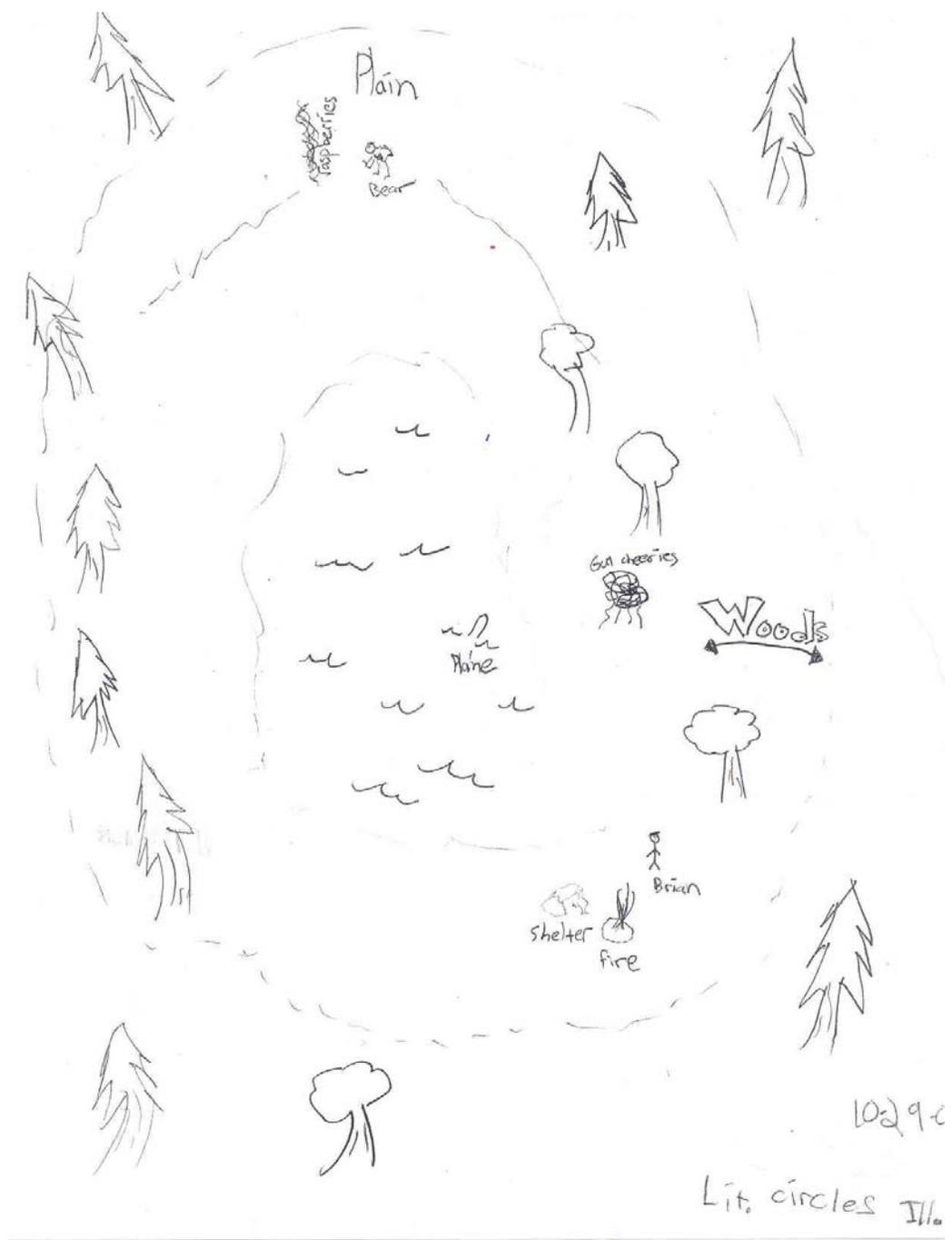


Figure 6. Scaler's illustration of the beginning of the story *Hatchet*.

Connector

Mrs. Trach: Today you will be making connections between what Brian is experiencing in *Hatchet* to you and your life. Now, I realize that probably none of you were in a plane crash that forced you to survive in the Canadian Wilderness, but you can still make some connections to what Brian is doing. You may have a similar experience for example, Brian was so thirsty that he drank so much lake water and eventually made himself sick. If my husband had to complete this assignment, he would be able to relate to Brian because when he was younger he thought Oreos were delicious. He ate an entire bag in one hour. Guess what? He made himself sick just like Brian. You can make connections to you, connection to similar stories, or similar authors of this book.

Role- Connector

Positive Student Remarks

- I think this page helped the most because it made me understand things better
- I got to connect with what Brian did.
- It was fun to think of what I would do.
- People got to learn about me.
- I got to connect real life to the book.

Negative Student Remarks

- I could not relate to Brian.
- I did not get the point of this idea.
- It made me think of bad things that happened to me.

Student Examples

- I was not going to eat raw eggs but luckily when I was six I got cactus needles in my arm just like Brian with the porcupine.
- I rode on a small plane just like Brian.
- It is just like the beginning of school, at first you don't know what to do and then you get settled.
- I ate berries right from the bush.

Figure 7. Students' thoughts and questions on Connector role.

Travel Tracer

Mrs. Trach: This role will be hard for us to see today because Brian is stranded in the woods for most of the story. Typically this role is really important for a story that has multiple settings or multiple characters. Your job tonight is to track the main character in the story. You can talk about where things happened and if the scene changed at all, and what page these changes took place. This role is great for reminding us of where we have been and where we are going.

Role- Travel Tracer

Positive Student Remarks

- I got to re-read
- Sometimes you forget what you read

Negative Student Remarks

- Not a good book
- No point to it
- The book was hard to 'trace'
- It was the same setting the whole time

Student Examples

- Brian's home to the airport then he was on the plane and then crash into the woods.
- Brian's hut to the woods then back to the hut.

Figure 8. Students' thoughts and questions on Summarizer role.

Vocabulary Enricher

Mrs. Trach: Today we are learning about our last role. We are looking for important words. They could be words that we don't know their meaning, or words that seem interesting, or even words that you think someone in your group may not know the meaning of. These words could be repeated, or are used in an unusual way. Make sure you use the chart and tell us the word, what it means, and where we can find it.

Role- Vocabulary Enricher

- Positive Student Remarks**
- I like to learn new words.
 - I like this role because I actually took time to find what words mean.
 - I am a fast reader so when I see a word I do not know, I skip it. It was fun because I got to go back and realize the words I skipped.

- Negative Student Remarks**
- The words were too easy in this book.
 - If I saw a word that I didn't know and then I would go and get a snack- I would forget where the word was.
 - I did not want to look up the words because you can tell what it means by the context clues.

Student Examples

*Intent	*Exasperated	*Continues
*Prospect	*Stabilize	*Baring
*Craved	*Insanity	*Rectify
*Streamline	*Prong	*Boughs

Figure 9. Students' thoughts and questions on Summarizer role.

Scene 6- Frustrations

(The class has finished reading Hatchet and learning the seven roles of literature circles. both the students and teacher are anxious to begin the ‘first official literature circle,’ but they keep stumbling upon roadblocks. Scene takes place over two weeks.)

Seneca: Mrs. Trach, are we going to start literature circles today?

Mrs. Trach: No, today we have to do our district based reading assessment.

Seneca: Ohhhh, ok. (Sad face)

Angela: Are we going to do literature circles today?

Mrs. Trach: Why do you want to?

Angela: Yeah.

Mrs. Trach: No, sorry, we have to get other stuff done first.

Aubrey: When are we ever going to do literature circles?

Mrs. Trach: Maybe tomorrow, but today we have to take our reading 4Sight.

Aubrey: I want to read!!!

So many wonderful things can happen when an educator implements literature circles in his or her classroom. Unfortunately there are a lot of set backs that lead to teacher frustration. The end of October is approaching and I still have

yet to start my first official literature circle. We read Hatchet as a class, and we learned about all of the roles. But we finished all of that almost two weeks ago, so why have I not started a literature circle?

In order for me to do literature circles in the classroom, I have to use literature circles as a supplement to the regular reading series. Every marking period we have to read two stories from the basal reader. Those two stories are accompanied by their own assessment. We also have to give five skill quizzes as well as an end of unit benchmark test. All of these grades compose the standards based report card grade, and only these grades. So as of right now, there is no way to incorporate my literature circles in my student's grades. My students do not enjoy the stories from the reading book, and even if they did, all of the stories are only a piece of a real novel. This frustrates me because I know that my students rise to a higher standard for literature circles. They just go through the textbook because they know that they have to, not enjoying what they are doing at all.

The next thing that is tremendously frustrating is not having enough time for literature circles. There is always an assembly or a district or state assessment that needs to be given and of course take precedence over literature circles. We are only in our second month of school, and already the students have taken a countless number of assessments. These assessments are not only boring, but they also make the students anxious because they are almost always taking some form of high stakes test.

It is so disheartening to hear my students ask everyday if we are going to start literature circles, because everyday I have to say, “not today.” If anything I already have proof that literature circles foster an excitement for reading, even without starting one. My students and I are still believers in a school system that supports a love of learning. Unfortunately, we seem to be one of the only ones.

Act Two

Scene 1-Book Talks

(Excitement is in the air. The teacher is about to present the four book choices for the first literature circle.)

Mrs. Trach: Good Morning! Today is the day we have been waiting for. We are officially going to being our first literature circle.

Students: (cheer)

Mrs. Trach: Please listen carefully because I am going to explain your four choices. Listen for a book that sounds interesting to you. I will also be ranking the books from the easiest to the hardest read. When I am finished I will be giving you each a piece of paper for you to tell me your first and second choice.

Brian's Winter by Gary Paulsen

Mrs. Trach: Brian's Winter is a continuation of *Hatchet*, except for one thing. Brian found the survival kit but the there was no emergency transmitter. So, Brian

is still in the woods. Gary Paulsen was getting over 200 letters a day, from kids like you. They were unhappy with the ending of *Hatchet* and wanted Gary Paulsen to try again. So, he did.

Brian has to survive and face his biggest enemy, winter. He has to take what he learned so far and try to be successful in the winter. So think about it, he doesn't kill a fool bird one day, just like in *Hatchet*, but now there is a snowstorm and he gets snowed in for a week. Now what?

This book is similar to *Hatchet*; Gary Paulsen will go into more detail about Brian's experiences. Some of you did not like how Gary Paulsen went back to talk about the "secret" or "the divorce." That style writing is not used as much as it was. This is a good book for fifth graders. If you could read *Hatchet*, you will definitely be able to handle *Brian's Winter*.

Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare

Mrs. Trach: This book is similar to *Hatchet* but it took place long ago. Actually, it is closely related to what we are studying right now in social studies. This story takes place when people were starting to move all over the United States. People would move out the woods and have a whole bunch of land that they would build a house and live on. That is exactly what Matt and his father did. They left their family and went to Maine. They built their cabin and starting planting crops and really started their new house. Matt's dad left to get his mother and sister and the

new baby and left Matt to take care of the house. Matt is your age and he has all of this responsibility. He is in charge, and in just a few days he loses his father's gun, and almost gets himself killed. A Native American chief and his grandson rescue him.

Matt and the Chief make a deal. Matt teaches the grandson how to read, and they will teach him how to hunt like the Native Americans. Matt begins to understand the Native American ways and becomes friends with them. But Matt's dad is still not back, and months have gone by. Is his family dead? Will he be alone forever? Should he leave the house and join the Native American tribe, who are nomadic? What would you do? This book is a good book for fifth grade readers; it is slightly harder to read.

Mixed Up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg

Mrs. Trach: The next book is *The Mixed up Files of Basil E. Frankweiler*. This story is about a girl who is fed up with her home life. She decides that she does not want to take the trash out any longer or do any other chores for that reason. So she decided to run away. But she decided not just to run away but to run somewhere else. She decides that she is going to live at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. She takes her younger brother Jamie with her because he has money.

They make their plans and leave. They actually are living in the museum when they stumble into a mystery. That is where Mrs. Frankweiler comes in. She is a cranky old woman and this book is actually her will. What is a will?

Lil Wayne: Something for when you die.

Mrs. Trach: Close, a will is a “to-do” list in case someone dies his or her family members know what to do.

Mrs. Trach: The book starts off with a letter from Mrs. Frankweiler to her lawyer Saxonberg. Listen carefully.

To my lawyer, Saxonberg:

I can't say that I enjoyed your last visit. It was obvious that you had too much on your mind to pay any attention to what I was trying to say. Perhaps, if you had some interest in this world besides law, taxes, and your grandchildren, you could almost be a fascinating person. Almost. That last visit was the worst bore. I won't risk another dull visit for a while, so I'm having Sheldon, my chauffeur, deliver this account to your home. I've written it to explain certain changes I want made in my last will and testament. You'll understand those changes (and a lot of other things) much better after reading it. I'm sending you a carbon copy; I'll keep the original in my files. I don't come in until much later, but never mind. You'll find enough to interest you until I do.

You never knew that I could write this well, did you? Of course, you don't actually know yet, but you soon will. I've spent a lot of time on this file. I listened. I investigated, and I fitted all the pieces together like a jigsaw puzzle. It leaves no doubts. Well, Saxonberg, read and discover.

Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

Figure 10. Quote read to students' from- (Konigsburg, E.L., 1967, p.1).

This book is a little bit harder to read. I know that some of you may get confused as you are reading, but as long as you take your time and talk to your group members, you will be fine.

Bridge to Terrabithia by Katherine Paterson

Mrs. Trach: The last book is the *Bridge to Terrabithia*. This is a great book. How many of you have seen the movie? (Almost all) Good. Well if you liked the movie you will love the book. This is a story about two kids who create a magical kingdom.

Jess and Leslie are two very different people. Leslie is just plain different. She is new in town and at first Jess hates her. But eventually they begin to be friends. They create the world of Terrabithia. Everything is going really well until something terrible happens. Read this book to find out what happens. This is the hardest read for this round of literature circles. There are some larger words in here, but again if you work with your group members, I am sure you will be fine.

Scene 2 -Unveiling of Literature Circles

(Today is the day everyone has been waiting for. The unveiling of literature circle groups and students will be given their novels.)

Mrs. Trach: I want to start today by telling you about your jobs for today when you get together as a literature circle group for the first time. You will be checking first to make sure that everyone has their own copy of the book, as well as your literature circle folder and notebook. Next, please take a minute to come up with a group name. Finally, I want you to introduce yourself to the group.

Jose: But I know everyone already.

Mrs. Trach: If you will let me finish, I want you to introduce yourself to your group, by the type of learner you are. Maybe you can tell your group member if you are right or left brained or if you have a problem remembering homework, of even if you have a tendency to read too fast or too slow.

Jose: Oh, I am a slow reader.

Mrs. Trach: Lastly, I want you to decide on what jobs you will each have tomorrow. We are not going to read today, but when we start reading tomorrow you will already know your jobs.

Aubrey: What! We are not reading today?

Mrs. Trach: Why did you want to read today?

Aubrey: Yes, please, please, please let us start.

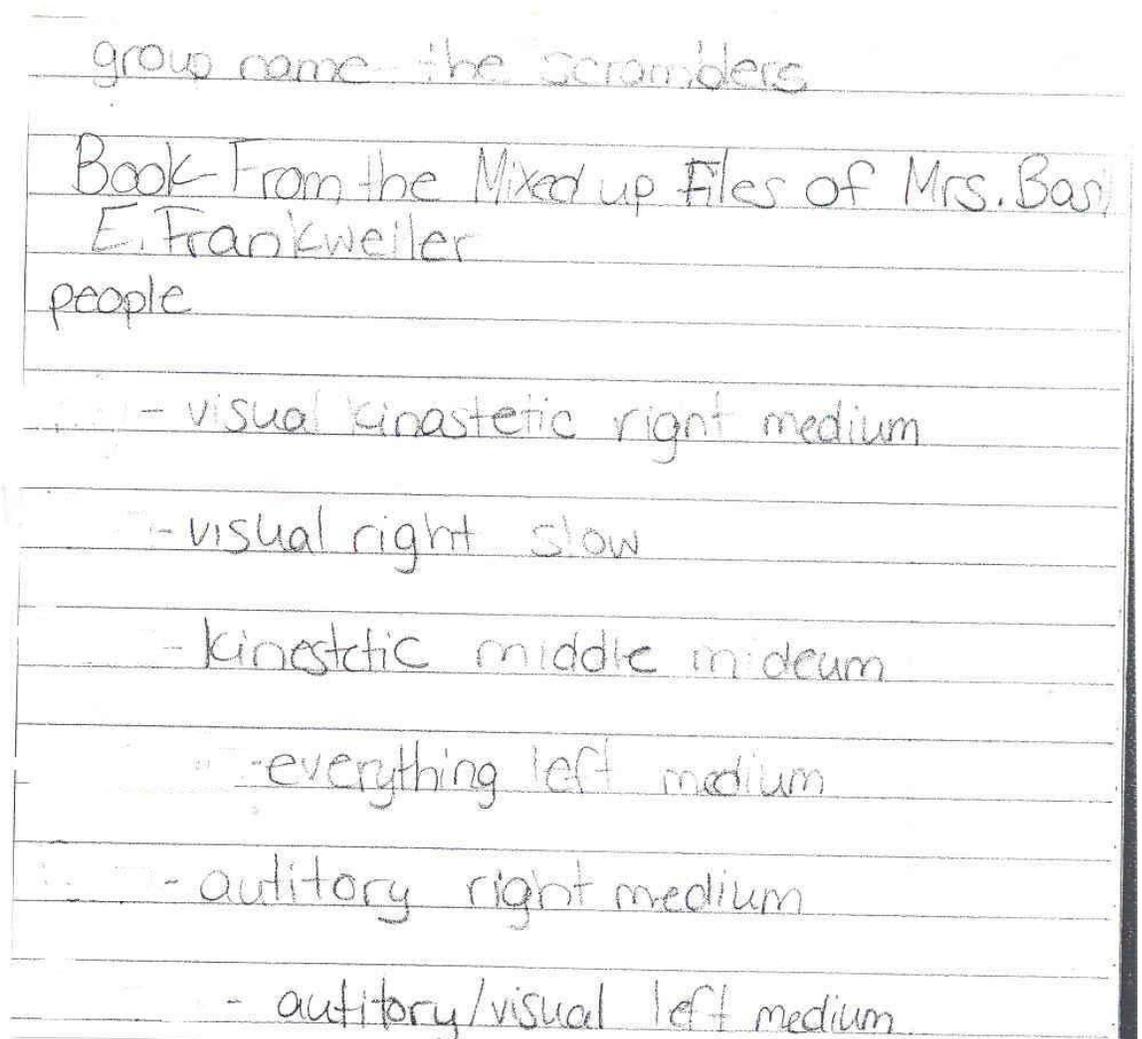
Today was the big day! I passed out the literature circle books and we got into our first official groups! I started the day reminding the students about responsibility and independence. I then talked about discussion group etiquette and passed out a chart that gave examples of positive and negative behaviors. I

then gave a similar blank chart to all students. I told them that I wanted them to put behaviors both good and bad on the chart that they are doing as well as what other group members did. I said that they have a week, and then I will be collecting the chart to look if any students need me to help them be a better group member. I also will be looking for students who are doing a good job, as well as a group that is working well together to perhaps model what a good literature circle looks like for the rest of the class.

I took all of the votes for who wanted what book and gave all students their first choice. I then made the groups by combining both classes and all ability levels. I told the students that I know that they are not with people that they are used to being with, but this is a trial run. If my students can prove to me that they can act appropriately and work well with others, maybe the next circle I will allow them to pick their book as well as their group. (There was much excitement about this statement).

As a teacher I feel that it is very important for my students to know themselves as learners. That is why I teach them about different learning styles. This year, my students are very competitive and thrive on labeling each other as who is gifted, or the smartest, fastest, etc. To help my students understand their differences I taught them about Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, and being right versus left brained. They enjoyed figuring out what type of learner they were. The first time they met in their groups they shared what

they knew about themselves as learners. Some groups even took notes on each other. This group in particular sat for the first thirty minutes taking notes on what type of learners they each were. They also went on to discuss some of their own strengths and weaknesses. In their conversations I also heard the comments: "I can be bossy, I giggle too much, and I read too fast." I was so proud of these girls.



group name - the scramblers

Book - From the Mixed up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler

people

- visual kinesthetic right medium
- visual right slow
- kinesthetic middle medium
- everything left medium
- auditory right medium
- auditory/visual left medium

Figure 11. Notes taken from Marie's notebook after group's first meeting.

Scene 3- The first day of Reading

(Scene opens to the first day of students reading in their literature circle groups.)

Mrs. Trach: Well today is the day we have been waiting for! Today we are reading in our very first literature circle groups. Today your task is to take turns reading out loud together. Remember that everyone gets a chance to read and if you stumble on a word someone can help you define it, or the vocabulary enricher will write it down to look up tonight for homework. You also want to be sure to stop every once in awhile and talk about what you read. Any questions? Go!

I took the opportunity to briefly visit each group to clear up any confusion and to get the group name that they decided on yesterday. I spent the majority of the time recording their names in their groups. I wanted to be sure not to interfere with what the students were doing. I wanted them to get the sense of being “in charge” of their reading. I did note that some students were helping others with vocabulary terms and some groups wasted a lot of time deciding how much a person could read in a turn.

Scene 4- Day two- reading and discussing

(Second day of literature circles. The day starts with a discussion of what was read yesterday. To help the students with this conversation they share their role sheets that they did individually last night for homework.)

Mrs. Trach: Ok guys just a reminder, first you share what you did last night for homework with the group, then you read. You should spend about ten minutes discussing and about twenty minutes reading new material. If you have not assigned jobs for tonight, do that as well today. Have fun!

Today was the first of the discussion days. I started by reminding the group of my expectations for the circles. Their assignment for today was to discuss what they did for their role last night. I emphasized the role sheets were only to be used as a guide. They are to help spark conversation about what they read on Friday. All students should be asking questions and commenting on what they read. I also assigned a post it note assignment for all students. I asked everyone to write one thing that interested him or her in what they have read so far, or something that he or she wanted to know more about.

The following are notes that I took as I visited with a few of the groups. Again I am trying not to get too involved yet, so that my students can develop a comfort level with their peers. Plus there are a lot of clerical questions at this time.

Smarties

Natalie- “It was kinda hard for me to make questions so its ok if you had a hard time.”

Ronnie did not do his homework, the group was nice about it and he said he would make it up tonight.

Scramblers

Aubrey- “Well this took place a long time ago and everything was less expensive.”

Sapphire- “I didn’t write this question down, I just thought of it.”

Hot Tamales

Seth- not paying attention

Alex- raises her hand to answer questions

“Yourn means yours just in a different language.”

Conversation about the word ‘coaxed’

Seth- soothing something

Alex- Persuade someone

KitKat- I wrote down push down hill like a car (coast)

Cyclones

Group told Cow (Vocab Enricher) what words they wanted him to look up as they read.

Scene 5- Day Three- Whole Group Discussion (Positives and Negatives)
(Scene opens with teacher standing in the center of the room. Students spent 20 minutes reading and now the teacher has gathered the entire group

together to check on the groups to see what is working and what is not working for the group.)

Mrs.Trach: As you are all making your way to your seats think about your feelings towards literature circles. I am looking for likes and dislikes about literature circles. I am also interested in hearing things that are going well in your particular literature circle as well as things that you are struggling with. Who would like to start?

Ashley: I like literature circles. I like to work with people in groups. I enjoy the roles- it is fun to do something different every night. I like to find out things that are related to the book

Mrs. Trach: Thank you that's excellent.

Skittles: I don't like how people talk over other people. I like how you get to pick your book. There are a lot of talkative people in my group. I like literature circles better than the reading book because they are smaller groups with different people.

Mrs. Trach: Well I heard some positives and some negatives in your answer. I also notice that your group members are nodding their heads in agreement with you. I have noticed that your group seems to struggle a bit with making decisions. Do any other groups have a suggestion for helping this group?

Liz: We picked our jobs on the first day and now we just go in the order of our list, this way we don't have to talk about jobs everyday.

Mrs. Trach: Fantastic idea!

Bing Bong: We have assigned seats so we don't fight about who sits where.

Mrs. Trach: Another great suggestion, Skittles, do you think that any of this ideas will help you?

Skittles: Yeah, our group fights a lot about our jobs every day; maybe we could do what Liz's group does.

Mrs. Trach: Great! Who else has a comment?

Jane: I like literature circles, I like reading the whole book. My group has homework issues some like to read at home and some don't. I like reading in literature circles because we get a chance to talk about things and make connections with the book.

I remember the information in the book better because we can talk about it unlike the reading book.

Mrs. Trach: Excellent point, does anyone else think this way?

Students: (majority of students raise their hands)

Mrs. Trach: Go figure, you all enjoy talking...

Students: (laugh)

Aubrey: In our group, if we only have a few pages left in the chapter, we finish the chapter for homework.

Mrs. Trach: Great work habits!

Bing Bong: My group is better than it was at first, we didn't agree on a lot in the beginning. I really like the book we are reading. I enjoy reading the whole book. Literature circles are more of a challenge. But some people in my group are paying attention all the time and some aren't.

Alex: Yeah and sometimes people interrupt when others are talking in our group.

Reese: Well in our group we use popcorn reading so we don't interrupt.

Mrs. Trach: Ok lets debrief for a moment. I have heard that we like literature circles but we are having some problems working as a group. See, I told you it was hard to teach. Literature circles are a working process. What does that mean?

Roscori: It means that we will get better as we do them more.

Mrs. Trach: Good. This literature circle will be the hardest one because all of you are getting to know each other as learners as well as figuring out how to run a literature circle by yourselves. Who else has a comment for us?

Scaler: I like literature circles I like reading and discussing things. We stop and talk about what we are reading every few pages. I like being able to read the whole book. I enjoy reading with others. I like this type of story.

Mrs. Trach: Well that's great, I have noticed your group is really working hard.

Jose: Some people in my group read too fast. The roles are hard they have lots of writing. I like literature circles more than the reading book. I do not have to read as much in literature circles. It is fun discussing the book I understand it better. I

like reading the whole story. I like being able to pick the book. Literature circles help students understand better.

Mrs. Trach: I heard some great points in their Jose. I want to remind everybody that we are all great readers, but we all have own reading speed. We have to be considerate of others and slow down when we read, or be patient while other people read.

Jose: Yeah, I read too slow I think.

Akon: I like the book especially when he kills animals. I like being able to talk to group and say what I think. I help other people. I think that I understand things better in small groups.

Mrs. Trach: Great points.

Avi: I think our group discusses the book too much sometimes, is that even possible?

Mrs. Trach: Well the goal is that everyone understands what he or she is reading. Does your group know what is going on in the book?

Avi: Yeah, we all know what is going on.

Mrs. Trach: Well then keep up the good work!

Cow: I like to get to know other people. I like to read more now. Roles are better than worksheets that go with the reading book.

Mrs. Trach: Good, I am glad to hear that.

M&M: Literature circles are fun. I don't like the reading book- the stories are 5 pages long you get to a good part and the story is over. I like being able to continue with the same series. I like working with others. It helps me to talk about what I am reading with the group.

Mrs. Trach: Great work everyone! I hope that maybe you heard some good ideas that you want to try out tomorrow in your own literature circle. I would love to keep talking about this, but it's time for lunch!

Scene 6- Hey Mrs. Trach, Have a seat.

(Mrs. Trach sat and observed most of the literature circle groups. She stopped by for several minutes at each group and simply took a few notes.)

Vampires (Too many cooks in the kitchen)

This is the group that is having the most trouble. There are a lot of dominant personalities in this group. There are several students that are quieter, and just go with the flow. [These students are also the academically higher achieving students.] The dominant personalities are very concerned with trivial details. They will spend twenty minutes arguing about roles or how someone got to read more words in their paragraph than another person. I have had to intervene several times to help solve some of these issues. The quieter students will just sit and let the other students "duke it out."

For example, today:

EagleFan- read too far ahead and put minimal effort towards his assignment. He was the discussion director and asked very vague questions that were dismissed by the rest of the group.

Hot Tamales- (Best Problem Solvers)

This group is working fairly well together. This group is all girls except for Seth. Seth is easily distracted and is upset that he has to work with all girls, but he was the only boy who selected *The Sign of the Beaver*. The girls were quick to come to me about his behavior, but they asked what they could do rather than asking me how to get Seth involved. I suggested that they did things like move his seat and tell him where they are in the book.

They are finished with the book and are excitedly working on their project. They decided to create Jeopardy and all the commercials that you would see on a “real TV show.” They will be filming at Alex’s barn

BingBong- said the book was “interesting/ boring”

KitKat- wasn’t the best book

Seth- It was ok, not the best book

Alex- “I liked it!”

Smarties- (Most Organized)

They finished reading the book over the weekend. Two or three students did not get a chance to finish, so they decided to discuss the end of the book

tomorrow and today they focused on the project. They organized themselves and got all of their parents to sign notes to stay after school. They spent an hour starting their project and researching. They are making a three-dimensional model of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They are also creating a pamphlet that would be handed out when people come to the museum.

Pinks- (Best Questions)

This group seems to work very well together. Most of the members are girls but there are two boys (the boys) who seem to be easily distracted, however they are typically on task. I observed some of the group members sharing their roles and I saw other students asking clarification questions. They ask good questions both before and during reading. Jose is loud to begin with and will often blurt out questions and they have great discussions, but sometimes they find themselves off topic.

Jose- Why does Brian always talk to himself? Do you think he is just lonely? They started talking about their project and they think that they may do a project with the claymation program.

Cyclones- (The King and Court)

This group is quiet. I believe that Akon has really taken charge of this group. He keeps all students on task and wants to keep the conversation moving. He read ahead and some of the other group members asked to be told what happens in the book. This group seems to work well together. On some of the

paperwork Akon mentions that he does too much talking and should stop, however, his group members noted how helpful he is and that they like him keeping them on track.

M&M (Most efficient)

Students were quietly reading and they were using the popcorn method per page. They seemed to have it down to a science. I could not help myself and stopped them a few times to help create mental pictures of what was happening in the book.

Collies (Most polite group)

I liked what I saw in this group. I wasn't with this group long, but I did hear:

“Does anyone else have anything else to say?”

“No, I think you summarized it very well.”

When they went to assign jobs they all would say ‘may I be’, or ‘can I be’ and they would let each other do what they wanted.

Each literature circle group is dramatically different from the next. They all have their ‘dilemmas’ as well as successes. It is interesting to view the different groups and as a teacher you being to wonder why the groups are so different. Could it be the book that the students chose? Or the combinations of students in a literature circle group? What about just one or two children that are changing the rest of the group’s dynamics?

As a teacher I felt that it is crucial for me to only intervene when absolutely necessary. At this point the students were only in their groups for just a few days and they needed more time to find their groove. I did help some groups with some organizational matters because it would have wasted too much reading time to let them figure out a 'cure' for all of their dilemmas.

Scene 7- Wrapping Up

We started literature circles with a discussion about when the books should be finished. When groups are finishing up with their books there usually is a few days in between the groups ending dates. To diminish the lag time, I have the students create projects to share with the rest of the class about the book. I do not grade the project because there are some groups that had a lot of time to work on the projects and some did not have as much time. I do not want students to rush with their reading or discussions for the project's sake.

I tell the groups that they need to do a project to show the rest of the class what their book was about. They are allowed to present in any manner that they would like. The only requirement is that there must be equal participation among students. The students were very excited about this fact and some look at this as an opportunity to perform, some an opportunity to use technology in the classroom.

Next, I gave the students a literature circle-debriefing sheet. This paper was designed to help the students to analyze themselves as well as the group. I explained each question to the students so that they knew my expectations.

Scene 8- The Role of a Teacher

(Scene opens with an empty classroom. Mrs. Trach walks in and directly addresses the audience. Entire scene is a monologue by Mrs. Trach)

Mrs. Trach: What is the role of the teacher when literature circles are in session?

~Facilitate- in the beginning of the year you will be very busy. There are a lot of little issues that need to be solved. You have to remember that if the teacher solves the problem, the students have learned nothing. I have found it most beneficial to offer suggestions or examples rather than taking over.

~Dialect/ Language Issues- These students sometimes struggle with words that are from a different language and or dialect. For instance in one of my books there was the word “aye.” The students were in the process of assigning that word for the vocab enricher to look up for homework. I feel that it is appropriate to intervene at this time to help the students understand what the author is trying to convey.

~Vocabulary- this is a tricky subject; it is hard for a teacher to draw a line on this topic. I try to understand my student’s ability level first. I will be quicker to help define a term for students who appear to be struggling more than another student.

I will also help to make sure the words are within their grasps or zone of proximal development.

~Clerical Issues- this completely depends on the maturity level of your students. The more mature students will struggle with dominant personalities arguing over assignments and responsibilities. The more immature students will argue more frequently. They will fight about who gets to read more, who had to do more for homework, and even where they physically sat yesterday. Again, if you solve the problem you are enabling the students. However, some student will waste too much time on trivial matters so as a teacher, pick your battles.

~Organization- Just like any other time in school organization is some student's strong point, but not all. Especially in the beginning of literature circles students will have a lot of trouble remembering everything that they need for their circle as well as their homework. You have to be patient; students run literature circles so the peer pressure of failing in front of their fellow classmates is a very strong motivator. Most students just need time to adjust. If homework issues start with individual students, send them to the "island" where they have to read and work alone for the day. That usually cures the situation.

~Interviewing- this is a great time to pull individual students or a whole group. This time is great for remediation/ enriching since all other classmates are busy with their circles.

~Listen- on a good day, I walk around and listen to what all of the different groups are doing. I listen for both positive and negative and then I share what I hear with the rest of the group. It is a great way to collect data. Most of the time I will go unnoticed because the group is so involved in what they are doing.

I make sure that all groups are involving all of their group members equally; I want to be sure that everyone is talking. The roles help with this as well. I also want to help my students solve any problems that may crop up prevention is key!

Curtain Call

(To announce the cast Mrs. Trach appears on a dark stage with a single spotlight on her, she states her last line of the play and exits the stage- house light come on revealing the entire cast, except Mrs. Trach)

Mrs. Trach: Above all please remember that for literature circles to be successful, *the kids are the ones running the show.*

Methods of Analysis

Throughout the data collection process, I used a wide array of different methods such as analytic, reflective and methodological memos. These allowed me to analyze my data using a variety of different lenses. I looked at my work through a figurative lens. Here I was looking for any uses of figurative language in my writing and figuring out their intended and literal meaning. For example I found an example of how I wrote that my students were ‘duking it out.’ Now, I did not witness a physical fight and the phrase literally means, but I did watch them argue with each other until they came to an agreement as a group. I used a methodological memo when I was about half- way through my study. I identified my research question as well as sub-questions. I also created brief summaries of each field log entry that I made to help me to see any themes emerging in my work.

I used a variety of methods when collecting data for this study. I maintained a field log where I wrote my feelings and observations on the day-to-day happenings in my classroom. I also administered several surveys to my students. I interviewed in a multitude of settings such as in the classroom, within a literature circle and individually with one student at a time in the hallway. I did this to help ensure that the students were being open and honest with me. Lastly, I gathered constant feedback from my students to help be as accurate in my findings as possible. After each class I would quickly record anything that I

observed if I did not get a chance to write my findings during class. I also asked the students to write and or verbally tell me about their experiences in the literature circles To help me find meaning in my data I read, re-read, coded and binned all of the data. Coding is taking information and searching for patterns in the data. Once patterns are found the codes are placed into a bin based upon a thematic connection between the different codes. This process followed the guidance of Ely, Vinz, Anzul, and Downing (1997). I paid great attention to writing students' comments down as accurately as possible. I also asked interview questions in several different ways and was sure that the students understood my question before they answered.

I used a pre (Appendix D) and post survey (Appendix E) in this study. I was looking to see the students thoughts on reading before literature circles and then again after the introduction of literature circles. I analyzed the personal comments that the students made by using bins and codes. In addition to that I also looked at each question and grouped the classes' response into three major sections: agree, disagree and neutral.

When I interviewed students I again analyzed at the students' responses by using the bins and coding process. I also was sure to ask the interviewing questions in a variety of ways to help ensure validity of the students' answers. I asked questions to the whole group, individual literature circle groups and individual students separate from the rest of the group.

When gathering feedback from my students I was sure to use a variety of methods. I had the students respond to me orally, as well as in writing. I then even went a step further and had my students write their responses on post it notes. I had them answer questions individually and as a group. Lastly, once all of their responses were gathered I analyzed the data using bins and codes.

I first recorded my observations in my field log, let a few weeks pass, and then go back and analyze my work. I discussed my finding with colleagues and administrators and professors. I was sure to keep my observations separate from my personal reactions and feelings. I eventually coded my field log looking for patterns and trends in my comments. After a significant amount of codes started to emerge I noticed that they had similarities to each other. I grouped them into bins (see figure 12) and then took that one step further by making the bins into a statement about my research. I created one theme statement (see figure13) for each of the bins in my study.

Codes and Bins

<p style="text-align: center;">Setting Up a successful Reading Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Ah-Ha Moments ~Clerical Issues ~Communication ~Environment ~Examples ~Making Connections ~Modeling ~Organization ~Reading Outside of the Classroom ~Roles 	<p style="text-align: center;">Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Literature Circles ~Post It Notes ~Surveys ~Whole Group ~Interview ~Discussion Difficulties ~Roles ~Collaboration
<p style="text-align: center;">Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Clerical Issues ~Environment ~Examples ~Homework ~Modeling ~Responsibility ~Roles ~Collaboration 	<p style="text-align: center;">Modeling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Maturity ~Ah Ha Moments ~Reflection ~Responsibility ~Self Monitoring ~Setting the Scene ~Collaboration
<p style="text-align: center;">Teacher Role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~Clerical Issues ~Differentiation ~Directions ~Examples ~Making Connections ~Modeling ~Reflection ~Roles ~Trouble Shooting 	<p style="text-align: center;">Student Role</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~AhHa Moments ~Communications ~Differentiation ~Directions ~Examples ~Making Connections ~Modeling ~Organization ~Reading Outside of the Classroom ~Collaboration

Figure 12. Codes and Bins

Theme Statements

1. Before a successful literature circle can begin, a teacher must take time to set up the environment, to model the roles by teaching organization and responsibility of each student when in a literature circle, and to create a reading friendly environment that allow students to make connections to text.
2. In order for students to actively participate in literature circles, the teacher must allow for different avenues of communication such as surveys, post it notes, in class discussions and literature circle discussions.
3. Literature circles depend on organization for success. The teacher needs to model and teach how the students should handle potential problems such as: clerical issues, homework, collaboration, and their roles.
4. Modeling must transpire before beginning a circle. The teacher demonstrates responsibility, how to reflect, and how to monitor one's own behavior.
5. a.) Students who are not responsible or who struggle with responsibility, students who do not understand how to effectively communicate, and students who become either too quiet or too loud are all potential challenges for a teacher.

b.) Different ability levels, clerical issues, communication, collaboration, and student reactions all affect how literatures circle operate.

6. As facilitators, teachers must understand that he or she assist the students with: clerical issues, differentiation, collaboration, making connections, roles, and reflection. Teachers should do this by modeling rather than controlling the situation.
7. Students involved in effective literature circles will show more organization, make connections to the text, follow directions, collaborate with others, and make connections with their fellow peers, completing their roles and reflection. The students will learn to work with others, to take and give effective instruction, to lead and learn by example, and to work as a self sufficient group that is responsible and will continue to learn and read without the teacher's constant assistance.

(Figure 13. Theme Statements)

Findings

Setting Up a successful reading environment

Before a successful literature circle can begin, a teacher must take time to set up the environment, to model the roles by teaching organization and responsibility of each student when in a literature circle, and to create a reading friendly environment that allow students to make connections to text.

There are several factors that must be in place before the introduction of literature circles. As a teacher, I took the time to model the behaviors of a good reader. I started this on the first day of school by talking to my students about our first read-a-loud book. I told them why I decided on this book and what factors I considered in my choice. As I read I made sure to stop and ask questions, again modeling the skills of a good reader. I asked thought provoking questions of my students and tried to get them involved with the process of reading as much as I could.

Throughout the beginning of the school year I also told my students about all of the parts of reading. We talked about how to pick books that were best for them. We discussed fluency and why a reader wants to read fluently. And we talked about the difference between thick and thin questions. All of these conversations helped my students to become good readers before the introduction of literature circles.

Literature circles are based on student centered learning. Before you can implement literature circles you must teach the skill of being a good reader as well as how to make choices that will benefit the individual reader. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) state, “When children share in their personal responses and interpretations of a book with one another they are able to gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their world” (p.31). This is important to establish before the beginning of a literature circle.

It is crucial for a teacher to allow students to be involved with the decision making process in the classroom. Participating in the decision making process really helps to empower the students and helps to create a sense of desire to be the best reader. Blum (2002) explains that empowerment is the key to unlocking students’ potential, because it allows the students to create and achieve their goals by understanding their strengths and limitations. Students who are empowered are not only active in decisions made about their education; they are also cognitively challenged (p. 100).

My students really enjoyed being involved in the decision making process. They quickly responded to me as their teacher, as well as reading. I am always having them vote on decisions in the classroom. They are open about their feelings on the books that we read; I think that the most popular comment about literature circles is that they chose their own book. They all state that they enjoy the fact that they got to choose what they are reading, even if they ended up not

enjoying the story. They asked questions frequently, they want to know why we do things in our classroom. My students feel much better about their education now that they are involved with making decisions. They feel comfortable with me, and they realize that everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses. They learned to handle problems with fellow group members without me. I recall stopping by at a literature circle group and a boy told me that he forgot his homework last night. Before I could speak his fellow group member said that the plan was for him to read what he missed last night in addition to tonight's homework. They also stated that he apologized and they accepted their apology as long as he did not do it again. Sometimes I truly feel left out and not needed when the groups are functioning so well. They are more tolerant of each other and of me. This understanding is why my students and I found such success with literature circles in my classroom.

Communication

In order for students to actively participate in literature circles, the teacher must first allow for different avenues of communication such as surveys, post it notes, in class discussions and literature circle discussions.

Before literature circles can begin, the teacher needs to make it clear to the students that their opinion not only matters, but also drives instruction. My students needed to trust me as their teacher. This trust led to open communication between the students and teacher as well as students to their

fellow peers. It was awesome that my students decided to share what type of learners they are. They also were brave enough to share their weaknesses as a group as well. A majority of students including Reeses stated “I prefer literature circles because you read with people and you get to hear other people’s opinion about the book.” Literature circles work best when students are honest with themselves and others.

Conversation is the key to literature circles. While the students are in literature circles they discuss the text with each other. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) explain that students bring their own experiences with them to share with the rest of the group, which means that each participant searches for different ways to interpret the same text. The conversation in the literature circle is replacing the teacher-led whole class conversation. This was met with great success in my classroom. A majority of my students indicated in surveys that they discussed the text and found a better understanding of the material because their fellow peers had a good way of explaining or demonstrating the material. When asked about this Jane stated, “Most definitely I learned more words and the fact that you read with other kids helps (they have more kid friendly explanations.)”As I walked through the room I was astounded by the conversations I overheard. I heard students asking clerical questions such as how to pronounce words, or what word means. I also heard them ask higher level thinking questions and statements such as:

“This made you understand the tragedy because of the words you used”

“What do you think was going through Brian’s head?”

“Did the chapter remind you of anything that happened lately?”

Literature circles force students to inquire about topics that are meaningful to them. All too often students in the intermediate levels read because they have to, or read material as quickly as possible, retaining nothing. (Pitton, 2005) Students who participate in literature circles are inspired by the fact that they are answering their own questions. “In literature circles I got to put in my ideas- that doesn’t usually happen when the whole class is doing it (discussion),” said a student involved in the Pitton study (Pitton, 2005, p.5). I found the same exact feelings in my classroom, one of my students stated “When I was the one asking the questions I was really thinking.” Another student mentioned, “I liked working with others because I liked being able to hear what other people thought about the same book, and then we could talk about it.” Most students loved the fact that they could play ‘teacher.’ How motivating!

Students need several ways to communicate honestly with the teacher. In my study I provided several different opportunities for my students to talk to me. We had some whole group discussions about trends happening in each literature circle. As the whole group listened, individual students or literature circle groups shared what was going well, and what they as an individual or

group needed to improve upon. Other groups would suggest to the group a strategy that helped them. I also visited each group on a somewhat frequent basis to 'check in.' I was sure not to correct behaviors, but simply to get the group to discuss ways to fix their problem together. I also took one student per literature circle group into the hallway to allow the students some privacy when answering questions about how the literature circle group was running. When in the hallway I would ask how the student thought the literature circles was going, and if any improvements could be made. All students stated that they enjoyed literature circles over the reading book. Their answers of why they felt that was were slightly different. Some reasons were: Ashely said that she enjoyed the different roles because the homework was different every night. Skittles liked, "literature circles better because they are smaller groups with different people." Jane mentioned, "I like reading in literature circles because we get a chance to talk about things and make connections with the book." Lastly, I provided post-it notes to each child to allow them to share thoughts and answer questions with their group member and/or me. The students seemed to be very honest with me. Some students preferred one avenue of communication over the other, so the variety of ways for the students to communicate with me was the best approach for getting all students to honestly participate in the conversations.

Organization

Literature circles depend on organization for success. The teacher needs to model and teach how the students should handle potential problems such as: clerical issues, homework, collaboration, and their roles.

The teacher's most important job is teaching via modeling the skills needed in a literature circle **before** the first literature circle begins. The teacher's job begins the first day of school. He or she will model how to problem solve by telling the students what things need to be considered before making a decision. The teacher models clerical issues by teaching the students organizational tips for remembering homework and for taking care of missed assignments. The teacher also needs to instruct the students about how to work collaboratively with each other with a character education program or by discussing problems as they arise with the whole class.

Schmuck and Schmuck (2000) explain that, "literature circles help to develop mature, independent, productive groups who have clear expectations, shared leadership and responsibility and establish open channels of communication." (reported in Daniels, p.35).

When introducing the students to literature circles I made sure to model organization and gave them tools to help them create establish their own routines. The process of literature circle is very structured; however, it is up to the students to execute the activities. "Literature circles are a very well-

structured activity, one that we would expect not only to be successful in accomplishing its goal- which is the clear and deep understanding of a book- but also to contribute to the general cohesiveness and productivity of the wider classroom community,” (Daniels, 2002, p.36). I introduced literature circles to my students by using role sheets. Role sheets are worksheets that guide the students to look for answers as they are reading in their particular roles. For example, if a student is the Discussion Director, their job is to come up with questions to ask the rest of the group about what was read the previous day. The role sheet would give the student example questions that could be asked, and prompt them to ask questions of their own. (See Appendix for examples of role sheets; also see figures 1-9.)

My students really relied on these role sheets when first starting literature circles. We began with the entire class reading the same novel and all students completed the same role and role sheet for homework each night. When they came in the following day, we discussed what different people did and any questions or concerns that they had. By the time we had finished the first novel as a class, students all understood what they had to do, we corrected any clerical issues and the students were organized and very productive!

Modeling

Modeling must transpire before beginning a circle. The teacher demonstrates responsibility, how to reflect, and how to monitor one's own behavior.

a.) Students who are not responsible or who struggle with responsibility, students who do not understand how to effectively communicate, and students who become either too quiet or too loud are all potential challenges for a teacher.

b.) Different ability levels, clerical issues, communication, collaboration, and student reactions all affect how literatures circle operate.

Harvey Daniels states, "The teacher's main job in literature circles is to *not teach*, at least in the traditional sense of the term, (Daniels, 2002, p.23). For success in literature circles the teacher needs to model more than to teach. A successful literature circle is run by the students and they only take the lead if they are empowered to do so. The teacher needs to model how to be organized, how to handle tricky situations, and how to work collaboratively with others. All of those skills are not something you can find in a teacher's manual. The teacher needs to utilize teachable moments to help the students hear how adults problem solve. If the teacher chooses to teach, then he or she will always have students that depend on the teacher to solve their problems. If a teacher models, the students will try to replicate what they have seen.

When my literature circles were ‘rolling,’ I noticed that some students were having difficulties. When students are in charge some of their peers will take the opportunity to not complete their homework, or to talk while others are speaking or just simply not participate in the circle. This is where I try to model before and during literature circles how students can work together and solve these issues as a group. BingBong stated, “My group is better than it was at first, we didn’t agree on a lot in the beginning.” She also added, “some students pay attention in my group and some do not.” This was a group that did a really nice job with some modeling examples that I gave them. They had one student in particular that was not participating like he was supposed to. Instead of correcting the behavior myself I asked questions such as: “What do you see me doing when I notice people not paying attention?” Is there a way that you can help him eliminate some of the things that are distracting him?” The girls took my advice and saw great improvement. Some groups stumbled briefly so I tried to show them some examples or model some different ways of handling situations. The modeling was all that some students needed, but I had one group in particular that needed more than modeling. I decided to intervene with that group. The group had a lot of strong personalities that all wanted things to be their way.

When students complained about their fellow peers my first instinct was to take note of the student that was being accused. I was sure to keep this record because I wanted to be able to watch for any trends with a particular student. The next thing that I would do is ask the students what they have already done. If they answer 'nothing' then I would tell them to go back and address the problem as a group. If the group had already tried to correct the problem and had no success, I would offer some suggestions, have them talk to other groups, or I would get all of the literature circle groups together and ask who had a similar problem and how they fixed it. All of us found it helpful after we had a few days of literature circles under our belts that we came back as a group and talked about what was working well and what wasn't. When students brought up things that their particular group was struggling with, other groups would respond with how they solved the problem. Here are a few examples:

Skittles: "We argue about our jobs."

Liz: "To pick our jobs we just go in order of the list that they are in."

Jose: "Some people read too fast in my group."

Resse: "We use popcorn reading in our group."

Reese: "We do not write down all of the vocabulary words that we should."

Snickers: “If there is a word that we do not know we stop and ask. If no one knows, we have the vocabulary enricher write it down for us.”

The last potential issue lies with differing ability levels in the same literature circle group. As the teacher I would always emphasize if the book was an easy or hard read. Occasionally I have students pick a book that is too hard for their ability level. This created some problems when the students were in their literature circle because members of the group would have to scaffold for others. For example, vocabulary words would prove to be more challenging and some students would be relied upon to answer questions about the words. Depending on the student this could be met with either success or failure. Another example would be the students' fluency rate. Slower readers tended to frustrate other group members causing them to want to read by themselves which is not allowed in literature circles. Some groups met these challenges with ease, which made the group very successful and other groups needed additional modeling on my part.

Teacher's Role

As facilitators, teachers must understand that they assist the students with: clerical issues, differentiation, collaboration, making connections, roles, and reflection. The teacher should do this by modeling rather than controlling the situation.

Fellow researcher Day states, “From this experience we realize that’s students are competent to discuss and teach one another. Because Jeni (teacher) lets go of control and gives them (students) an opportunity to make sense of the story through discussion, we are able to see what students are capable of doing themselves. We also become more aware of each student’s growth and progress in reading,” (Day, 2002, p.17). I think that the hardest part of literature circles, is control. It is incredibly hard for a teacher to let go of control over the classroom. In turn, it is hard for the students to take control and ownership of their own learning. This is essential, though, for a literature circle’s success. What I mean by that is if a teacher decides to try a literature circle but does not allow the students to take full ownership of their learning, the students will not feel empowered and therefore will not perform.

Daniels stresses, “She (the teacher) knows that in running literature circles, the teacher’s main job is not to translate or interpret the books, but to facilitate the works of the groups, “(p.42). He goes on to explain, “Now it may happen (and often does) that the topics that the kids come up with match the ones that the teacher would have asked. But ownership makes a big difference: this way the students are in charge of their thinking and discussion” (Daniels, 2002, p.22). Autonomy and choice are extremely powerful motivators in the classroom. My students enjoy being able to make decisions about what they learn. Literature circles afford students more choice

in the classroom, which gives them a deeper understanding as well as a better experience rather than reading a pre-selected text.

I must admit that it is hard at first to relinquish control and become the facilitator rather than the teacher, but it does get easier. When students have questions or concerns my first instinct is to fix the problem, but I must remember that if I am always fixing the dilemmas then I am the only that knows how to correct problems.

Student's Role

Students involved in effective literature circles will show more organization, make connections to the text, follow directions, collaborate with others, and make connections with their fellow peers, completing their roles and reflection. The students will learn to work with others, to take and give effective instruction, to lead and learn by example, and to work as a self sufficient group who is responsible and will continue to learn and read without the teacher's constant assistance.

Teacher and researcher Timothy Blum stated, "The various roles that the students enact in literature circles encourage them to make predictions, construct visual images, create connections to personal experiences and other texts, monitor their reading and whether it makes sense, solve word-and text- level problems in flexible ways, summarize as they go, argue with the author and evaluate content

and writing style,” (p.101). The students are in charge of not only creating the questions for their fellow group members but figuring out how to answer the question. When students stop to listen to each other the possibilities for learning are endless.

Empowering students and allowing them to participate in their own education truly made a difference in my classroom. My students really learned to make choices and to work collaboratively with each other. What I discovered through this study was that the most important thing to a literature circles success is taking the time to create the classroom environment. It took months for the students to feel comfortable each other as well as myself. I needed to establish a safe and caring environment where my students felt comfortable enough to talk about their feeling in class as well as to accept their own abilities as well as others.

By the second round of literature circles my students had overcome most of their clerical issues. They took care of missed homework assignments; they were organized, and made decisions as a group. I did become a facilitator; I felt as if I was an independent contractor. Students would come to me only when they had tried to solve the issue as a group first and were unsuccessful. I typically got involved with issues such as habitual missed homework assignment offenders, too many dominant personalities in one group, and organization of project guidelines and due dates. Overall by the spring, my students were independently running

their own circles, asking and answering challenging questions of each other, and learning how to work in groups. When asked what they learned in literature circles my students stated the following:

“I learned how to pick better books because now I know what to look for in a good book.” Reeses

“I learned that reading out loud is better than reading silently because I can get a better picture in my head.” Aubrey

“I learned how to work with other, which I was not very good at before literature circles.” Roscori

Next Steps

Literature circles are still 'rolling' in our classroom. We are about to begin our third circle. My students are improving with each and every literature circle. They are asking better questions, missing less homework, and are creating fantastic projects demonstrating a deep understanding of their literature circle book. My students read for pleasure more now than they ever have. They tell me that they feel like they are picking better books for themselves and they feel more empowered. They will ask my opinion of 'good' books so occasionally I will do book talks about books that I have read to help them get a better understanding of the content as well as the reading level.

My greatest piece of advice for anyone about to use literature circles in their classroom would be to take your time. Success depends on how comfortable students are in the classroom. I took almost three months modeling the behaviors that I wanted to see my students using in the circles. I started on the first day of school with my read aloud book. I would stop and comment about the book, and ask clarification questions. I also immediately began creating an environment where students knew themselves as learners and that everyone learns differently. My next step was modeling the different roles to the entire group at the same time. This was a boring and tedious process that is a must because the students had an opportunity to hear several examples of the same job. When the first circle started I was visible but would only intervene if necessary. The students must feel

that they are in control. I made it clear that I was not longer the teacher; I would only get involved if the group proved that they needed me.

Unfortunately, there is more to teaching reading than implementing literature circles. Above all my number one priority is delivering and assessing the standards based assessments. I know that my students read and comprehend so much more when they are involved with literature circles, but I always will come back to the standards. Currently my students are reading novels that are closer to a seventh grade level or more, but I still assess them on a fifth grade level.

My future will always involve literature circles to some degree. I fear that education will take away my flexibility as a teacher. In my eyes, literature circles are the best way to differentiate reading instruction in the intermediate grade levels. Students feel empowered because they are allowed to make choices about their own education. The teacher is given the opportunity to work with a small group of students based on ability level. Most importantly though literature circles are a real life activity, they force students into working collaboratively with each other, to rely on one another for instruction, and to learn to accept differences in themselves and others.

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August 25, 2008

Katie Trach
124 South Pine Street
Nazareth, PA 18064

Dear Katie Trach:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "How Literature Circles effect (sic) intermediate student achievement." Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail (medwh02@moravian.edu) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review
Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415

August, 2008

Mr. Yanek,

I am currently taking courses towards a Master's Degree at Moravian College. One requirement of my current course, "Reflective Practice Seminar," is to conduct an action research study in my classroom. I have chosen to look at Literature Circles and plan to gather data that will examine what happens when students have choice in what they are reading. I also plan to compare the results of Literature Circles related tasks to more traditional tasks, such as reading in the basal reading book.

I will be collecting data from August to December, 2008. During this time, we will be working in both Literature Circles and the Reading book. Reading class will follow the normal routine, the assignments will just be more personalized for each individual group and what book they choose. I will be continuing to assess student writing using the District Benchmarks, standardized stories and the assessments that accompany them, as well as DIBELS testing, but the majority of reading class will be based around the books chosen in Literature Circles.

I am hoping that this study will be very beneficial to both the students and myself. I want to help my students understand that reading is not just for the classroom. Reading takes place at all times for real purposes. I will also be listening to the thoughts of my students, and yourself throughout the study. If my study is successful, I will be sure to share the results with Language Arts department. My ultimate goal is to prove that students can have a choice in what they read in the classroom, and by exciting them about reading that their passion will carry into the rest of the world and they will become life long readers, even in a Standards based world. All students will be required to participate in Literature Circles, but I will use only the participant's information as part of the data collected for my college course assignments.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to my students. Please keep in mind that all of the assignments are required of my students, however they can decide whether or not I can use the information about them when writing my paper for Moravian College. Their parents also have the right at any time to discontinue their permission for me to use their child's information in my study. Please feel free to call me at any time with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for your consideration,

Katie Trach

I have been made aware of the intention of Mrs. Trash's action research thesis study and am granting my permission for the said study to take place from August until December, 2008.

Principal's Consent _____

Date _____

August, 2008

Dear Parents or Guardians,

I am currently taking courses towards a Master's Degree at Moravian College. One requirement of my current course, "Reflective Practice Seminar," is to conduct an action research study in my classroom. I have chosen to look at literature circles and how they improve academic success. I plan to gather data that will examine what happens when students have the ability to choose what they read. I also plan to compare the results of literature circles to the more traditional results of reading from a basal reading book.

I will be collecting data for this study from August to December 2008. During this time, we will be working in both literature circles and the reading book. Reading class will follow the normal routine, the assignments will just be more personalized for each individual group and depending on the book they choose. I will continue to assess student writing using the District Benchmarks, standardized stories and the assessments that accompany them, as well as DIBELS testing; but the majority of reading class will be based around the books chosen by the student for their literature circles.

I am hoping this study will be very beneficial to both the students and myself. I want to help my students understand that reading is not just for the classroom. Reading takes place at all times for real purposes. I will also be listening to the thoughts of my students, and would appreciate your input throughout the study. If my study is successful, I will be sure to share the results with the Language Arts department. My ultimate goal is to prove that by giving students a choice in what they read in the classroom, it will get them excited about reading, it is my hope that if students become excited about reading their passion will carry into the rest of the world and they will become life long readers, even in a Standards based world.

Each student will be required to participate in our classroom literature circles, but I will only use the data I gather from students who have parental consent. In September, I'll be sending home a survey for you to fill out regarding your child's reading interests. I'll ask you to fill out a similar survey at the end of the study to gage your child's progress. These surveys are instrumental in the success of the project.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to your child. You may remove your child from this study, at any time, by contacting me by phone or email. Please keep in mind that all of the assignments are required of your child, however you can decide whether or not I can use the information when writing my paper for Moravian College. Please feel free to call me with any questions or concerns.

If you have any concerns about your child's involvement with this study, please contact:

Mr. Chris Mamana (Bushkill's Guidance Counselor) (610) 759-1118

Dr. Joseph Shosh (Professor at Moravian College overseeing this study) (610) 861-1482

Thank you for your consideration,

Katie Trach

I have read this form with both Mrs.Trach and my parents and they have explained it to me so that I understand what will be happening.

Student Signature _____

Date_____

I attest that I am the child's parent, or legal guardian and that I have read and understand this consent form. By signing below I am allowing my child to participate in the study. With my signature I am also agreeing to participate in this study by allowing the results of my surveys to be used as part of this study.

Parent Signature _____

Date_____

Reading Survey

Name _____

Date _____

1. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you like to read?
2. On a scale of 1-10, do you think you are a good reader? (1-lowest, 10 highest)
3. When you do read, what kind of books do you enjoy?

Magazines
Comics
Poetry
Short Stories
Mysteries
Fantasy
Realistic Fantasy
Historical Fiction
Realistic Fiction
Other

4. Do you like working in a group with other students?
5. Do you think that you are a responsible student? Why or why not?
6. Do you think you will like Literature Circles? Why or why not?

7. Do you like reading from the Reading book? Why or why not?

8. How many books did you read last year?

9. Do you think that reading in a small group will help you understand what you are reading?

10. Who is your favorite author?

11. How would you rate your reading ability?

Low				High
1	2	3	4	5

Literature Circle Survey

Name _____
Date _____

1. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you like to read?
2. Do you think that your reading skills have improved since September? Why or why not?
3. When you do read, what kind of books do you enjoy?

Magazines
Comics
Poetry
Short Stories
Mysteries
Fantasy
Realistic Fantasy
Historical Fiction
Realistic Fiction
Other

4. Do you like working in a group with other students?
5. Do you think that you are a responsible member of your Literature Circle group? Why or why not?
6. Do you prefer to read in the Reading Book or in Literature Circles? Why or why not?

7. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you enjoy reading in Literature Circles? (1-lowest, 10-highest)

8. On a scale of 1-10 how much do you enjoy reading in the Reading Book? (1-lowest, 10-highest)

9. What is your favorite thing about Literature Circles?

10. What is your least favorite thing about Literature Circles?

11. Have you read any books for fun?

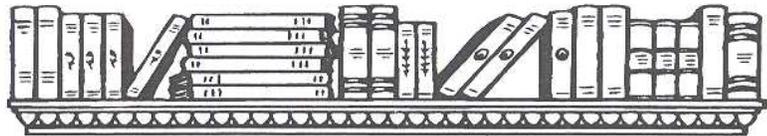
12. Who is your favorite author?

13. How would you rate your reading ability?

Low					High
1	2	3	4	5	



Literature Circle Folder



Literature Circles Role Sheet

Summarizer

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Summarizer: Your job is to prepare a brief summary of today's reading. Your group discussion will start with your 1–2 minute statement that covers the key points, main highlights, and general idea of today's reading assignment.

Summary:

Key Points:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Connections: What did today's reading remind you of?

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Discussion Director

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Discussion Director: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about the small details; your task is to help people talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions. Usually the best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read. You can list them below during or after your reading. You may also use some of the general questions below to develop topics for your group.

Possible discussion questions or topics for today

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Sample questions

- What was going through your mind while you read this?
- How did you feel while reading this part of the book?
- What was discussed in this section of the book?
- Can someone summarize briefly?
- Did today's reading remind you of any real-life experiences?
- What questions did you have when you finished this section?
- Did anything in this section of the book surprise you?
- What are the one or two most important ideas?
- What are some things you think will be talked about next.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Investigator*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Investigator: Your job is to dig up some background information on any topic related to your book. This might include

- the geography, weather, culture, or history of the book's setting
- information about the author — her/his life and other works
- information about the time period portrayed in the book
- pictures, objects, or materials that illustrate elements of the book
- the history and derivation of words or names used in the book
- music that reflects the book or its time.

This is *not* a formal research report. The idea is to find bits of information or material that helps your group better understand the book. Investigate something that really interests you — something that struck you as puzzling or curious while you were reading.

Sources for information

- the introduction, preface, or "about the author" section of the book
- library books and magazines
- on-line computer search or encyclopedia
- interviews with people who know the topic
- other novels, nonfiction, or textbooks you've read

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

* Adapted from *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse Publishers; York, Maine, 1994. Published in Canada by Pembroke Publishers, Markham, Ontario, 1994).

Literature Circles Role Sheet

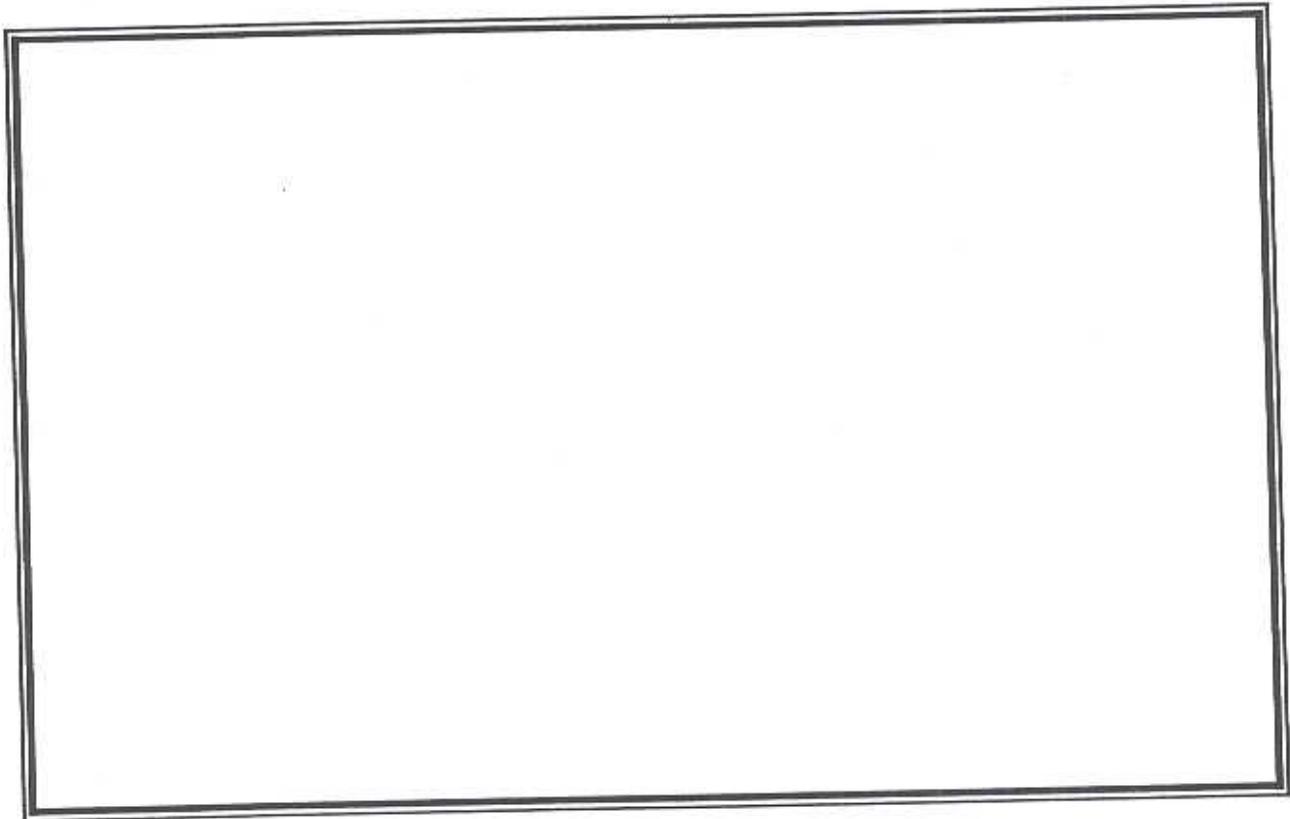
Illustrator

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Illustrator: Your job is to draw some kind of picture related to the reading. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flow chart, or stick figure scene. You can draw a picture of something that is discussed specifically in your book, something that the reading reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the reading. Any kind of drawing or graphic is okay. You can even label things with words if that helps. Make your drawing on this paper. If you need more room, use the back.



Connections: What did today's reading remind you of?

* Adapted from *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse Publishers: York, Maine, 1994. Published in Canada by Pembroke Publishers, Markham, Ontario, 1994).

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Connector

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the book your group is reading and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to your own life, happenings at school or in the community, similar events at other times and places, or other people or problems that this book brings to mind. You might also see connections between this book and other writings on the same topic or other writings by the same author. There are no right answers here. Whatever the reading connects *you* with is worth sharing!

Some connections I found between this reading and other people, places, events, authors:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Travel Tracer*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Travel Tracer: When you are reading a book in which characters move around often and the scene changes frequently, it is important for everyone in your group to know *where* things are happening and how the setting may have changed. So that's your job: to track carefully where the action takes place during today's reading. Describe each setting in detail, either in words or with an action map or diagram you can show to your group. You may use the back of this sheet or another sheet. Be sure to give the page locations where the scene is described.

Describe or sketch the setting

- **where today's action begins**
Page where it is described _____

- **where today's key events happen**
Page where it is described _____

- **where today's events end**
Page where it is described _____

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

* Adapted from *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse Publishers, York, Maine, 1994. Published in Canada by Pembroke Publishers, Markham, Ontario, 1994).

Literature Circles Role Sheet

Vocabulary Enricher*

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Meeting Date _____ Assignment: Pages _____ to _____

Vocabulary Enricher: Your job is to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in today's reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them while you are reading and then later jot down their definition, either from a dictionary or from some other source. You may also run across familiar words that stand out somehow in the reading — words that are repeated a lot, are used in an unusual way, or provide a key to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your circle meets, help members find and discuss these words.

Page No. & Paragraph	Word	Definition	Plan

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow: _____

Assignment for tomorrow: Pages _____ to _____

* Adapted from *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse Publishers: York, Maine, 1994. Published in Canada by Pembroke Publishers, Markham, Ontario, 1994).

Literature Circles

Daily Literature Study Record

Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

Name	Date	Book Brought	Prepared for Discussion	Participated in Discussion	Comments

Literature Circles

Novel Study Self-Evaluation Guide

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

I brought my book to class. _____

I read to where I was supposed to each time. _____

I talked about the book in the discussion group. _____

I listened to what other people had to say about the book. _____

I didn't fool around in my group. _____

I used sticky notes to mark places I didn't understand or places I wanted to talk with my group about. _____

I wrote in my reading log and finished any assignment on time. _____

My overall rating of myself is as follows:

I think the person who should get the best grade in my group is _____ because

Literature Circles

Self-Assessment Form

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

My Contribution to Group Discussion

Rate each entry as: 1 – Needs Improving, 2 – Satisfactory, or 3 – Very Good

Type of Contribution	Rating	Example
I shared my ideas and offered my suggestions.	1 2 3	
I spoke clearly and slowly enough to be understood.	1 2 3	
I answered others questions.	1 2 3	
I remained on topic and helped the group stay focused.	1 2 3	
I encouraged others to participate.	1 2 3	
I disagreed without hurting others feelings.	1 2 3	
I summarized or repeated my ideas when necessary.	1 2 3	
I gave reasons for opinions.	1 2 3	
I listened courteously and effectively.	1 2 3	
I tried to understand and extend the suggestions of others.	1 2 3	

My most important contribution to the discussion was _____

My plan for improvement is _____

Literature Circles

Literature Circle Evaluation

Name _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

Preparation	Student	Teacher
I am prepared for our meetings by consistently doing my preparation work in my notebook.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I am prepared for our meetings by reliably bringing my literature book to class.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I am prepared for our meetings by completing my reading assignments on time.	1 2 3	1 2 3
Participation	Student	Teacher
I participate well in discussions by asking questions of others.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by offering my own ideas.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by encouraging and respecting others' opinions.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by making eye contact with others.	1 2 3	1 2 3
I participate well in discussions by keeping my voice at arm's length (cool, objective).	1 2 3	1 2 3
Comments	Student	Teacher
I am doing my job well.		
Yes, I do this.		
I don't always do this, and I need to improve.		

Literature Circles

Assessment Form for Discussion Groups*

Names _____ Circle _____

Book _____

Date started _____

Groups Discussion Topic or Focus _____

Check the appropriate box. Provide evidence where possible.

	Yes	No	Sometimes	Evidence
Everyone participates and shares in the discussion process. Communication is interactive.				
The group is supportive of its individual members. Group climate promotes friendliness.				
Group members often ask questions for clarification or elaboration.				
The group discussion stays on topic or on directly related issues.				
The group is energetic and enthusiastic.				

What was the best thing about the way this group worked together?

* Saskatchewan Education, *English Language Arts: A Curriculum Guide for the Middle Level* (draft) (Regina: Saskatchewan Education, 1996).

What was one problem the group had?

How did you solve it?

What else might you have done?

What specific plans do you have for improvement?
