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Implementation of literature circles

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Implementation of literature circles

Abstract

Literature circles are a current and effective technique requiring a group of students to read the same text and then meet to discuss their thoughts on what they read. The purpose of the project is to explain to teachers the components of literature circles and the benefits they have for students. The project will look specifically at what both the student and teachers roles' should be throughout the implementation. It will also inform teachers of different ways to incorporate literature circles into their own classroom.

Implementation of Literature Circles

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Introduction

This project is designed to use for a two-day staff development class on effective ways to implement literature circles into the classroom. Literature circles are a current and effective technique requiring a group of students to read the same text and then meet to discuss their thoughts on what they read. The purpose of the project is to explain to teachers the components of literature circles and the benefits they have for students. The project will look specifically at what both the student and teachers roles' should be throughout the implementation of literature circles.

This project will inform teachers on the different ways to incorporate literature circles into their own classroom. This author believes that students will grow academically and socially through their experiences with literature circles. The teachers will discover how the teacher role shifts during the incorporation of literature circles as well as become familiar with the expectations of the students throughout the process

This project is important because the students in these teachers' classroom will benefit from participation in literature circles. They will grow academically and socially through their experiences with literature circles. Through this different approach students may become more motivated to read, improve their social interactions through group discussions, and improve their reading comprehension.

Literature Review

Balanced Literacy

After many years of intensive arguments between advocates of phonics and whole language, a resolution may have been found. No longer are educators focusing on whether the drilling of letter sounds through phonics instruction or the natural learning of reading in whole language programs is more effective than the other. Instead, balanced literacy programs have emerged into classrooms across the nation. This framework combines components of both phonics and whole language programs into one. Balanced programs appear to give both children and teachers the best opportunity for success (Speigel, 1998).

Balanced literacy programs are often described as a combination or blend of whole language and phonics (Bauman, Hauffman, Moon & Duffy-Hester, 1998). Balanced instruction allows teachers to provide systematic, explicit instruction and practice focused on decoding and comprehension (Freppon & Dahl, 1998). Teachers can analyze each student's strengths and weaknesses and then determine what teaching approach would most benefit the student. Teachers may choose an approach that focuses more on phonics instruction, one focusing on whole language approaches, or a combination of both (Speigel, 1998).

Balanced approaches help teachers meet the needs of most children because such approaches are not restricted to one way of developing literacy (Speigel, 1998). Using one approach may not completely meet the needs of all students. For example, one student may need help with developing both word recognition and comprehension. Teachers

implementing a balanced approach may choose to give instruction using both phonics and whole language strategies to target both areas of weaknesses. Teachers implementing a balanced literacy program can be flexible throughout their instruction. They can decide what is most effective for each child and change the emphasis easily.

Therefore, teachers have more freedom to match instruction to the needs of each student.

Recent research powerfully suggests kids need three vital kinds of balance between wide and close, extensive and intensive reading, and a balance in the kind of social interaction they experience around books to become better readers (Daniels, 1994). Consistent interactions with peers revolving around school work can increase learning and build peer relationships (Daniels, 1994; Fountas & Pinnel, 2001). When working together, students learn from each other's different perspectives. They also learn how to effectively interact with peers.

Within the balanced literacy framework, teachers may choose to have their students participate in literature circles. Literature circles easily fit into a balanced framework because they share the elements of a balanced approach. Students participate in student directed, small group, moderately intensive reading (Daniels, 1994). They work together with peers as a team all reading the same book with the same goal: to discuss their reading and learn from each other through the process.

Literature Circles

Literature circles (also known as literature discussion groups, book clubs, or readers' circle) are small groups of students who meet specifically to discuss a chosen author, book, topic, or theme (Noll, 1994). Literature discussion groups are promoted as a

more equitable and engaging way for students to share and discuss their responses to literature (Maloch, 2002). The small group format, usually four to six members, allows every individual to be an active participant in sharing ideas and constructing interpretations (Daniels, 1994). A small group setting allows all students' voices to be heard. Experts agree that literature circles should consist of a heterogeneous group of students (Routman, 1991). This gives the opportunity for both male and female perspectives to be shared. Groups may be formed based on student's interests and students choice of books. It is important for teachers to realize that groups formed are temporary. Literature groups must be flexible and able to be periodically changed accordingly to students' interests, strengths, and needs (Routman, 1991).

Choosing good books is a key to successful literature circles. Teachers should select a wide variety of high quality texts that will enrich students learning throughout reading and discussing the book (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). A common practice of choosing books is to provide choices to the students. The teacher chooses a few quality books and their students choose which book they would like to read from the options. There are several factors for teachers to consider when choosing book selections. The book must be developmentally appropriate, "teach" and "stretch" students and their learning, include layers of meaning, exemplify worthwhile issues, reflect a variety of perspectives, represent our diverse world, encompass a variety of authors/illustrators, genres, formats, range of levels, and special features (Fountas & Pinell, 2001).

Student's Role

Once groups are formed and books are chosen, students develop a routine for their literature circles. Literature circles must be regularly scheduled, not just an “occasional treat”, but continuous throughout the school year (Daniels, 1994). Students can read and respond one day and participate in the literature circle on the alternating day. Other schedules can work as well, but the most important factor is that students know when they will meet (Daniels, 1994).

When students finish reading the assigned text, they are to respond to what they read. Many teachers use role sheets for students to respond to what they read (Daniels, 1994). Students are assigned to one role, such as Discussion Director, Connector, Illustrator, Word Finder, Travel Tracer, etc. They will fill out the role sheets and reflect on their reading. Then each student shares their reflections in their respective role during discussion. Daniels believes this is a motivating way to get all students involved in their reading and make them accountable for their own role.

Once students have successfully used role sheets to carry on discussion in the literature circle, the teacher or students may choose to respond without the role sheets. Instead, they may freely share their thoughts and feelings as they read. Daniels states that “role sheets are usually abandoned when groups are capable of lively, test-centered, multifaceted book discussion drawn from open-ended entries”. Some teachers even begin without the role sheets so students immediately begin responding completely on their own. Both approaches have been effective in classrooms (Daniels, 1994; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

The time spent discussing can vary among groups. However, any literature session needs a good amount of time. Anything less than twenty minutes does not allow the possibility for a natural discussion to open up (Daniels, 1994). Students need time to settle down, get comfortable within the group, and to participate in in-depth conversations.

Teacher's Role

The teacher's role in literature circles is multi-faceted and involves a balance between demonstrating, directing, supporting, redirecting, and observing while students work independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The goal is for the teacher to gradually shift responsibility to the students. At first the teacher should be very involved in gathering book selections, guiding student choice, and establishing the routines of expected behaviors. At the beginning much of the guidance will be to model effective discussion techniques.

As students start using discussion techniques effectively with little guidance from the teacher, the teacher should transition to the next phase. This next phase is to focus on critical thinking skills and reading strategies that will result in the student's deeper construction of meaning. This reciprocal teaching method begins with the teacher first modeling the strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing and then working with students to develop the ability to use these strategies (Leal, 1993). The rationale is that such tasks help students focus on the textual material and monitor their own comprehension (Leal, 1993).

When Should Teachers Use Literature Circles

Literature circles can be used when teachers want to extend their students thinking of text or simply when a change is needed. Literature circles challenge students to think more in-depth of what they read. Often teachers choose to use literature circles when their students have mastered basic reading strategies. Those teachers are looking for an additional challenge that fosters critical thinking of what is being read. Literature circles definitely provide a framework for that. However, Daniels explains that literature circles are for everyone and can bring beneficial results to all readers. As with any activity modification can be made to meet the needs of different groups.

Benefits of Literature Circles

There are many benefits that are associated with the implementation of literature circles. Students will grow academically and socially through their experiences with literature circles. The students who participate in literature circles may benefit from the following: responsibility and increased motivation to read, a deeper comprehension of text read, and improved social collaboration.

With literature circles students are able to make several decisions on their own, which is motivating to many reluctant readers and gives students a feeling of control over a part of their reading (Burns, 1998). First, students have a choice in the book they read. Second, the students decide together within their groups how much to read and when to they will meet for their literature circle. Third, the members of the groups decide what to discuss. Literature circles provide many choices that motivate students to read. Students like being in charge of leading their own discussions as well as making decisions for

themselves (Peralta-Nash & Dutch, 2000). As students engage collaboratively together on reading and discussing their texts, they learn to appreciate reading at a deeper level (Harvey & Goudvis, 2002). The opportunity to discuss books together in a group format is more interesting and appealing to students than the independent reading most students are used to participating in (Leal, 1993).

Increased comprehension is another benefit of literature circles. The students participate in discussion about the content they read. This gives them the opportunity to talk out loud about their thoughts as they read. When students discuss what they have read, they think more deeply about literature, work out confusing sections with their peers, synthesize important information and themes, evaluate characters' behaviors, and respectfully challenge their classmates' ideas (Daniels, 1994). Discussions that are less teacher-centered and more student-led may encourage students to engage in more problem-solving talk and lead to more in-depth understanding of the literature (Eeds & Wells, 1989). Students have the chance to help one another in constructing meaning. They are helping each other to modify and extend individual interpretations. This new, negotiated understanding would not have been available from an independent reading (Leal, 1993). In-depth and critical thinking is developed through interactions with others. Therefore, a deeper meaning being found as the students explore books together. The social interaction that takes place in a literature circle is a key component of its success. To be able to verbalize the contents to listen to other modes of thinking, and to hear other perspectives all contribute to deepening comprehension (Burns, 1998).

As groups work together they are doing more than constructing meaning. They are gaining valuable social skills as they interact with peers. Together they make many

decisions as they talk, listen, and negotiate throughout the process. Students who participate in literature circles work together to form a “community of readers” (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). They are able to take ownership over their learning, read passages aloud to their peers, suggest books to each other, and more honestly communicate their opinions (Hepler & Hickman, 1982). Throughout the process students learn to participate in discussions with others. They learn that to lead effective literature circles each participant must listen to each other, take turns talking, and build on each others statements and responses (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The students learn that they must work together as a team to effectively complete their assignments and in doing so build relationships with peers.

Summary

The road to effective literature is not an easy one. The teacher involved must repeatedly model appropriate collaboration skills and reading strategies in order to scaffold student’s skills. The ultimate goal is to transfer control of the group over to the students so they are constructing meaning together with little guidance from the teacher. All the hard work and perseverance will be worth it as the teacher is able to step back and observe students working collaboratively as they discuss the literature they have read and reach higher levels of understanding.

Literature circles take students’ learning to the next level. They challenge the students to think carefully about what they read and reflect with their inner thoughts and feelings. They have the opportunity to share with peers and gain insights to how others reacted to the same texts. Together the students gain a deeper understanding of what was

read. Literature circles are a great tool for teachers to use if they want their students to gain more responsibility, become more motivated to read, collaboratively work with peers, and reach a deeper understanding of reading material.

The Project

Procedures

This project was designed as a staff development workshop for teachers because this strategy is new to many teachers at this school. I want to provide them with the opportunity to discover how literature circles can be implemented into their classrooms in order to benefit their students' literacy learning. The procedures taken to develop this project were to first gather research to show to teachers how they can use literature circles in their classrooms and to display the benefits for students. The second step was to design a framework to teach the teachers the different ways to incorporate literature circles in their classroom in order to meet the different needs of their students. Table 1, on the following page, displays the time spent on each area within the staff development workshop. Three books were chosen based on their strong content. The books chosen were *Sadako* by Eleanor Coerr (1997), *Pink and Say* by Patricia Palocco (1995), and *Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (1994). These books are likely to promote in-depth conversations among group members. Each story, set in an important time period in history, is thought provocative. Members of the literature circle would have opinions to share about them.

Table 1- Time Table for Literature Circle Staff Development

<p>Day One (90 minutes allotted)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Introduction- 10 minutesWhat are literature circles?- 5 minutesBenefits of literature circles- 5 minutesSet-Up- 12 minutesStudent and Teacher Roles- 12 minutesMini-lesson Ideas- 8 minutesResponse Options- 8 minutesEvaluation Process- 10 minutesBook/ Group Selection- 10 minutesQuestions- 10 minutes
<p>Day Two (90 minutes allotted)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Introduction/Recap of Management- 5 minutesLiterature Circle Model- 10 minutesLiterature Circles- 40 minutesFill-out Evaluation Form- 5 minutesEvaluation Discussion- 10 minutesFinal Whole Group Discussion- 10 minutesQuestions- 10 minutes

A fourth book, *A Bad Case of the Stripes* by David Shannon (1998), was also chosen to use in a model literature circle in which this author and three teachers will participate. This book was chosen because it deals with self acceptance, an issue many people have dealt with and may easily make connections with. The third step was to create hand-outs that make this learning process visually easier for the teachers involved. The workshop was then designed to take place over two different hour and half periods of time designated for staff development workshops. The two sessions will be held on two separate days and will take place at Cattell Elementary in the Des Moines Public School District during the allotted time designated by the district for staff development workshops. Approximately 20 staff members will participate including classroom teachers and support staff.

Session One

This session will focus on introducing the concept of literature circles to teachers. The hand-outs found in the appendixes will be handed out to accompany the presentation. The following will be used as an outline for the presentation:

I. Introduction

I will discuss the content of balanced literacy framework focusing on Reader's Workshop, which has the following components: independent reading, guided reading, and literature study. Literature circles constitute an important part of the literature study component.

II. What are literature circles? (Appendix A)

I will discuss the basic features of literature circles. I will pass out appendix A for the participants to follow along with and use for note-taking or future references.

III. Benefits of literature circles (Appendix B)

I will discuss the multiple benefits of literature circles including reading comprehension, motivations, and social collaboration.

Appendix B will be handed out. I will also share personal experiences of the benefits I have personally seen with students who have participated in literature circles in my classroom.

IV. Set-Up (Appendix C)

I will discuss the four major components of setting up literature circles: book choice, assignments, group management, and modifications for struggling students. I will hand out appendix C. I will also share personal experiences with setting up literature circles in my classroom and what worked well for my students.

V. Student and Teacher Roles (Appendix D)

I will discuss the student's role before, during, and after group discussion. The participants will learn what is expected of students during each of these phases. I will also discuss what the teacher's role is while introducing literature circles and how this role changes throughout the process. I will discuss my experiences with

implementing literature circles and the changes I made with my role throughout the process. Appendix D will be handed out.

VI. Mini-lesson Ideas (Appendix E)

I will discuss how mini-lessons are a great way to introduce key concepts of literature circles to the entire class. I will hand out appendix E and briefly talk about how the listed mini-lessons are beneficial for preparing students for literature circles and the reading process that goes with literature circles.

VII. Response Options (Appendix F)

I will pass out appendix F and discuss the listed ways to have students respond to the reading they do. I will discuss how crucial this step is in adequately preparing students for their group discussions. I will share personal experiences with what has worked well with my students.

VIII. Self Evaluation (Appendix G)

I will hand out appendix G and discuss how each student will fill out an evaluation form. This form focuses both on the individual's performance and well as the entire groups' performance during the literature circle. The teacher can choose how often the groups fill this form out. I will share what has worked well in my class. The students can fill this form out immediately after a discussion has been held and then use it to refer to during their group discussion of their performance.

After this presentation the teachers will be divided into groups of 6-7 teachers. Each group will be provided a selection of the three books; *Sadako* (1997), *Story of Ruby Bridges* (1995), and *Pink and Say* (1994), to choose from to read as a group. The groups will be expected to read the book and respond in a response journal before the next staff development workshop (session two). There will be a three week time span in between session one and session two.

Session Two

In session two a review of group management of literature circles (see Appendix C) will be discussed prior to each group's discussion. At this time I will model a short literature circle with the help of three other teachers. We each will have read *A Bad Case of the Stripes* by David Shannon (1998) and responded with our connections, questions, predictions, etc. I will begin the literature circle and the others will add their comments and questions as we go along. This will be an opportunity for the participants to observe what a literature circle should look like. I'll address the topics of leading the discussion, effective ways to switch topics, questioning or disagreeing with others' comments in a positive manner, building on each others' ideas, and staying on topic. I will also share experiences I have had with literature circles in my classroom.

I will share how one group struggled with the management of their literature circle. They had great ideas and were well prepared for group. However, getting their ideas shared was problematic as everyone wanted to talk at once. I suggested using hand signals (see Appendix C) to indicate when they had something to say. The hand signals indicated whether they had something to add to the current topic being discussed or was

ready to begin a new topic. This group also assigned one person to begin the discussion and also to monitor the groups' ability to stay on task. Once these changes had been made the groups' discussions improved and the students seemed to learn more from their peers.

Another experience I will share is how I modified literature circles to a group of struggling students. These students also had good ideas but struggled with writing anything lengthy. I had them respond by drawing pictures and writing a couple sentences to share their response to what they read. In their literature circles they referred to what they had drawn and elaborated in-depth on their ideas. This seemed to take some pressure off the students. They were more comfortable with this way of responding and felt they had something to add to their discussions.

I will also share how modeling is important in implementing literature circles. Whenever I see a group continue to struggle with an aspect of literature circles, I will step in and become a participant in the discussion. I will model whatever technique I want the students to improve. For example, one group had difficulty elaborating upon other group members' ideas. I became a participant and modeled effective ways to build upon the ideas group members shared. I would listen to what the members said and then ask follow-up questions or make explicit connections to their ideas. I would then step back and take on the role as an observer. After their discussion, I would compliment students who displayed the techniques I modeled earlier. The students slowly began to improve their ability to ask follow-up questions and make connections to the ideas their group members shared.

The established groups will then meet to discuss the books they read. One person in each group will begin the discussion and the others will respond and participate in the

discussion. I will rotate between groups and participate in the discussion being held. These discussions should last approximately 35-40 minutes.

After the discussions have concluded, a presentation will be given on ways to assess literature circles. Throughout the presentation I will explain to the teachers that it is important to assess literature circles in order to confirm that the students are making progress in discussing the books they've read. Since literature circles are mainly a student-led, independent activity, teachers are encouraged to engage students in self-assessments (Daniels, 1994). I will share how my students have used this form to guide their evaluation discussions. I will discuss how it helps them reflect on the literature process and requires them to think about how to improve in their future discussions.

Appendix G will be distributed to the participants. This assessment form requires the participant to reflect both on his/her own participation as well as the groups' performance. Following their viewing of the evaluations, each teacher will evaluate themselves as well as their group's performance of the literature circles they participated in that day. Each group will then discuss their evaluations focusing on what they did well and what could be improved if they were to meet again. The groups will then come together and participate in a whole group discussion on their experiences with literature circles. I will then open up the discussion to any questions the participants may still have regarding literature circles.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This author feels that this project would be beneficial for teachers to use in classrooms of third grade or higher. The project is based on a balanced literacy program, which has been implemented across many school districts. The research cited supports

the use of literature circles on improving students' reading comprehension, which is the current focus among many schools nationwide.

Students will enjoy participating in literature circles as they have an opportunity to be in control and communicate with others as they learn together. Teachers participating in the workshop will come away with an understanding of what literature circles are and why they are beneficial to use in their classrooms. They will have a better idea how to introduce them to their students and what role they should play throughout the incorporation of literature circles.

This author recommends further workshops be designed to help teachers learn more about literature circles. It would be beneficial to create a workshop that specifically discussed the best ways for students to respond to their readings in order to increase group discussion and reading comprehension.

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Annotated Bibliography of Children's Literature

Coerr, E. (1997). *Sadako*. New York: Putnam Juvenile.

Sadako is a story of a young Japanese girl who is sick with leukemia she contracted from the radiation of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The story depicts the strength and courage Sadako and her loved ones display as she fights to survive. Her family and friends follow the routines of the famous Japanese legend of the a thousand paper cranes. It is believed that if they make Sadako a thousand paper cranes then good health will come to her.

Coles, R. (1995). *Story of Ruby Bridges*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

This book is about the journey of a six year old African American girl, Ruby Bridges, who due to a court mandate attends an all white school. The book describes her daily walk through crowds of upset white parents who do not believe she should be allowed to attend this school. Ruby Bridges displays courage and determination as she faces the racism of others in her fight to receive and education.

Polacco, P. (1994). *Pink and Say*. New York: Philomel.

This book is based on a true story about Pink, a young African American soldier, and Say, a white soldier, during the Civil War. Say is wounded and Pink takes care of him and carries him to the home of his family where he can rest to get better. A strong friendship is developed throughout the story as the two struggle to survive the hardships of war.

Shannon, D. (1998). *A bad case of the stripes*. New York: Blue Sky Press.

This book is about a young girl, Camilla, who worries too much about what other's think. She pretends to dislike lima beans because others will make fun of her. She then becomes different colors and keeps changes according to others suggestions. She learns that it doesn't matter what others think but should instead be true to herself.

Appendix A

What are Literature Circles?

- ❖ A group of 4-6 members that read the same text
- ❖ Students may be of same or different reading abilities
- ❖ Students discuss text by sharing, questioning, analyzing, and making predictions about the book
- ❖ Students may have a choice in what book they read
- ❖ Groups are heterogeneous
- ❖ Groups meet several times to discuss the book
- ❖ Groups decide what to read and when to meet

Literature Circles are an arena for students to explore literature together and to build understanding and response in collaboration with each other (Morris & Perlenfein, 2002, p. 14).

Benefits of Literature Circles

- ❖ Motivating to students to be a part of decision making process
- ❖ Students helping each other construct meaning
- ❖ Expanding reading comprehension strategies
- ❖ Promoting acceptance of peer's abilities, strengths and weaknesses
- ❖ Students gaining valuable social skills as they interact with peers
- ❖ A small group setting allows all students' voices to be heard
- ❖ Challenging students to think more in depth as they analyze what they read to prepare for group discussion

Discussions that are less teacher-centered and more student-led may encourage students to engage in more problem solving talk and lead to more in-depth understanding of the literature (Eeds & Wells, 1989, p.8).

Set-Up

Book Choice:

- ❖ Should be based on student interest
- ❖ Teacher may choose 4-5 high quality books and let students choose among the selections
- ❖ The books should relate to critical issues and experiences in readers' lives
- ❖ The books should provoke deep reflection, questions, and discussion

Assignments

- ❖ Group decides what and how much to read
- ❖ Group decides when to meet and to discuss readings
- ❖ Students decide how to respond when to their readings

Set Up (Continued)

Group Management

- ❖ One student starts the discussion and others join as they wish

- ❖ Hand Signals (may use to make conversation smoother/ less interruptions) -
 - Two fingers down= student has something to add to current topic
 - One thumb down= student is ready to share something on a new topic

Modifications for Struggling Students

- ❖ Students who cannot easily read text may have it read to them, read with a partner, or listen to it on tape

- ❖ Role Sheets (Daniels, 1994)- structured format to respond to one specific role

- ❖ Sketch to Stretch strategy (Whitin, 2002)- students sketch part of story and share its importance with group

- ❖ Use of graphic organizers- structured format to respond to readings

Appendix D

Student's Role

Before Discussion

- ❖ Chooses book
- ❖ Reads book
- ❖ Prepares for discussion

During Discussion

- ❖ Shares responses
- ❖ Listens and adds to others responses

After Discussion

- ❖ Participates in group evaluation discussion
- ❖ Plans for next meeting

Teacher's Role

Teacher's role will shift throughout implementation of literature circles. A gradual release of responsibility should take place as students become more independent and are able to hold effective discussions on their own.

Beginning

- ❖ Facilitates discussion
- ❖ Models effective techniques in responding to literature and sharing responses with group
- ❖ Guides students through evaluation discussion focusing on what the group did well and what they need to improve on next time

As students begin showing improvement...

- ❖ Becomes a participant in discussion as students begin to take control
- ❖ Eventually becomes an observer as the students take full control of the group
- ❖ Listens to evaluation discussions and provides own input after group is finished with their own comments

Appendix E

Mini-Lesson Ideas

- ❖ Selecting books
- ❖ Thinking and talking about your reading
- ❖ How to buzz with each other
- ❖ Abandoning books
- ❖ Keeping a record of your reading
- ❖ Guidelines for working together
- ❖ Responding to reading
- ❖ Using post-it instead of role sheets
- ❖ Thick and thin questions
- ❖ Making connections
- ❖ Making predictions

Response Options

Students May:

- ❖ Respond by using role sheets
- ❖ Respond to open-ended prompts or questions
- ❖ Record unfamiliar words (include page numbers)
- ❖ Record page number of sections that need clarification/ ask questions to clarify meaning
- ❖ Record interesting words, phrases, or sentences
- ❖ Record page numbers of passages that they share aloud
- ❖ Tell what they liked or didn't like about the book
- ❖ Note observations on characters
- ❖ Make connections (personal, textual, or world)
- ❖ Sketch a picture they visualize in their mind
- ❖ Infer the author's meaning
- ❖ Predict what will happen next
- ❖ Describe why they think the author wrote the book
- ❖ Describe what they think the theme is or lesson is

Appendix G

Literature Circle Self & Group Evaluation

Name: _____ Date: _____

Text: _____

1. How would you rate your participation in the discussion?

just right too much too little not at all

2. What did you do to prepare for the Literature Circle that was helpful?

3. What is something you learned in your Literature Circle?

4. How would you rate your group's discussion?

lively average boring

5. How helpful was today's discussion?

Very helpful somewhat helpful not helpful

6. What worked well today?

7. What will you do to improve next time?

Adapted from: McLaughlin, M. & Allen, M.B. (2002). *Guided Comprehension: A Teaching Model for Grades 3-8* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Appendix H

Literature Circle Examples

Example 1: Group struggling with the management of their literature circle.

They had great ideas and were well prepared for group. However, getting their ideas shared was problematic as everyone wanted to talk at once. I suggested using hand signals (see Appendix C) to indicate when they had something to say. The hand signals indicated whether they had something to add to the current topic being discussed or was ready to begin a new topic. This group also assigned one person to begin the discussion and also to monitor the groups' ability to stay on task. Once these changes had been made the groups' discussions improved and the students seemed to learn more from their peers.

Example 2: Modified literature circles to a group of struggling students.

These students also had good ideas but struggled with writing anything lengthy. I had them respond by drawing pictures and writing a couple sentences to share their response to what they read. In their literature circles they referred to what they had drawn and elaborated in-depth on their ideas. This seemed to take some pressure off the students. They were more comfortable with this way of responding and felt they had something to add to their discussions.

Example 3: Modeling is important in implementing literature circles.

Whenever I see a group continue to struggle with an aspect of literature circles, I will step in and become a participant in the discussion. I will model whatever technique I want the students to improve. For example, one group had difficulty elaborating upon other group members' ideas. I became a participant and modeled effective ways to build upon the ideas group members shared. I would listen to what the members said and then ask follow-up questions or make explicit connections to their ideas. I would then step back and take on the role as an observer. After their discussion, I would compliment students who displayed the techniques I modeled earlier. The students slowly began to improve their ability to ask follow-up questions and make connections to the ideas their group members shared.