

Literature Circles

Implementing Literature Circles may seem like a daunting task, but, with foresight and planning, this approach provides students an opportunity for tremendous growth. Literature Circles can make the vision of differentiated instruction a reality in your classroom. From the texts you allow students to select, to the way you group your students, to the specific products you require, you will find flexibility to differentiate based on the needs, abilities, and learning styles of your students. In Literature Circles, students can independently apply the skills and strategies learned throughout the year. Once the groups are established and the procedures are modeled, you will be a facilitator of learning, empowering your students to explore and respond to their books.

Using Online Discussion in Literature Circles: Since Literature Circles are a highly effective method of engaging all students in thoughtful discussion of their reading, you might want to consider extending students' experience through the use of online discussion boards (such as Blackboard) or even email. This experience can provide an authentic audience for students' writing, and it gives them more time to compose their thoughts than an in-class discussion.

Consider the access that students have at school and at home, and create assignments accordingly. For example, you might require that each student post to the discussion board once a week; in addition, you might give students a set number of postings, perhaps two or three, to which they must respond. Naturally, you should expect each student to read the responses to his or her postings and respond to those as well. Limiting the Internet requirement to once a week or so should allow students enough time to fulfill the assignment, but, as always, analyze and adjust the situations as necessary.

You will probably want to keep the groups small so that the number of postings and responses remains manageable, but if two Literature Circles are reading the same book you might want to combine them. You may want to include yourself in the discussion group, or you might tell students to print and turn in their most thoughtful postings periodically. This process can help you closely monitor students' reading progress.

Preparing for Literature Circles

Before you begin the Literature Circle activities, you will need to determine the following:

- 1. How to assign students to groups and roles:** You may group by interest level, reading level, or both. You might want to allow students to select their own groups. Each group contains five roles. You may decide to have students change roles within the group many times or only a few times. You might decide to use the role sheets at the beginning of the book study, and move away from them as your students master the art of book discussions.
- 2. The books you will use:** Gather in advance the books you will use for your Literature Circles. You might have each group read a different book, or you might have more than one group read the same book. It will be more interesting if students read a

variety of books; however, the final decision on which books to include rests with you. Based on available resources, you may be able to use books to which you already have access. When making your selections, consider texts (either fiction or nonfiction) that are of high interest yet sufficiently challenging, books whose characters are well developed, and books that provide ample opportunities for students to make connections to themselves and their world.

3. **A schedule with due dates for reading and discussions:** You may have students read silently in class, do sections as homework assignments, read aloud to one another in small and large groups, read aloud in a teacher-directed reading setting, and listen to oral readings. The high interest level of the books combined with a variety of reading strategies and activities should keep students actively engaged. Plan in advance for due dates to fall at logical breaks in the books. Simply dividing by the number of pages might not be an effective way if it interrupts the action.
4. **When to integrate discussion and activities:** You will not only need to think through how to conduct the reading for each “chunk” of the book, but you will also need to decide how to handle discussion of each reading assignment. Role descriptions are provided so students can lead themselves in group discussions. Students may take turns performing the various roles, and you may decide to assign students more than one role so that you can have smaller groups.

Additional Suggestions

You might consider creating a folder for each Literature Circle. The folder can house a calendar and reading schedule for the group, background information or pronunciation guides for that group’s book, descriptions of the Literature Circle roles, etc. In addition, consider allowing students to make name badges or place cards for each role. The badges or place cards can be stored in the group folder; then, when the group is meeting, each student can wear a badge or have a place card in front of him or her to identify his or her role. The folder and badges can help connect and ground students as they journey through the book together. Additionally, the folder can serve as a message center for you to check progress and leave notes for individual groups. You can also create a central message board that is divided into Literature Circle sections; that way, students can post their questions for you using sticky notes.

The following pages describe the roles that students take in Literature Circles and may be photocopied for them.

Literature Circle Roles

In your Literature Circles, you will be responsible for preparing information for each meeting according to your role.

Discussion Leader: Your job is to develop a list of questions you think your group should discuss about the assigned section of the book. Use your knowledge of **levels of questions** to create thought-provoking literal, interpretive, and universal questions. Try to create questions that encourage your group to consider many ideas. Help your group explore these important ideas and share their reactions. You will be in charge of leading the day's discussion.

Diction Detective: Your job is to carefully examine the diction (word choice) in the assigned section. Search for words, phrases, and passages that are especially descriptive, powerful, funny, thought-provoking, surprising, or even confusing. List the words or phrases and explain why you selected them. Then, write your thoughts about why the author might have selected these words or phrases. What is the author trying to say? How does the diction help the author achieve his or her purpose? What tone do the words indicate?

Bridge Builder: Your job is to build bridges between the events of the book and other people, places, or events in school, the community, or your own life. Look for connections between the text, yourself, other texts, and the world. Also, make connections between what has happened before and what might happen as the narrative continues. Look for the characters' internal and external conflicts and the ways that these conflicts influence their actions.

Reporter: Your job is to identify and report on the key points of the reading assignment. Make a list or write a summary that describes how the writer develops the setting, plot, and characters in this section of the book. Consider how characters interact, major events that occur, and shifts in the setting or the mood that seem significant. Share your report at the beginning of the group meeting to help your group focus on the key ideas presented in the reading. Like that of a newspaper reporter, your report must be concise, yet thorough.

Artist: Your job is to create an illustration related to the reading. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flow chart, or other depiction. You can choose to illustrate a scene, an idea, a symbol, or a character. Show your illustration to the group without any explanation. Ask each group member to respond, either by making a comment or asking a question. After everyone has responded, you may explain your illustration and answer any questions that have not been answered.

Discussion Leader Role Sheet

Name:		Book:	
Group:		Pages:	

Your job is to develop a list of questions that you think your group should discuss about the assigned section. Use your knowledge of **levels of questioning** to create thought-provoking literal, interpretive, and universal questions. Try to create questions that encourage your group to consider many ideas. Help your group explore these important ideas and share their reactions. You will be in charge of leading the day's discussion.

Discussion Questions:

Sample question ideas:

- What kinds of conflicts are the characters facing?
- What do you think about the way the author _____?
- What if _____ had happened instead?
- What would you have done had you been in this character's shoes?
- What did you think about this event?
- Did this surprise you? Why or why not?
- What do you think will happen next?

Questions that should be revisited the next time the group meets:

Diction Detective Role Sheet

Name:		Book:	
Group:		Pages:	

Your job is to carefully examine the diction (word choice) in the assigned section. Search for words, phrases, and passages that are especially descriptive, powerful, funny, thought-provoking, surprising, or even confusing. Complete the graphic organizer below on the selected words, phrases, or passages. During the discussion, you can read the words, phrases, or passages yourself; ask someone else to read them; or have people read them silently before sharing your thoughts on it.

Page #	Word, Phrase, or Passage	Reason for Selecting Word, Phrase, or Passage	Why did the author select this word or phrase? What is the author trying to say? How does the diction help the author achieve his or her purpose?

Bridge Builder Role Sheet

Name:		Book:	
Group:		Pages:	

Your job is to build bridges between the events of the book and other people, places, or events in school, the community, or your own life. Look for connections between the text, yourself, other texts, and the world. Also, make connections between what has happened before and what might happen as the narrative continues. Look for the characters' internal and external conflicts and the ways that these conflicts influence their actions.

Event from Book	Types of Connections: - Text to self - Text to text - Text to world	Connection
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Event from Book	Types of Connections: - Text to self - Text to text - Text to world	Connection
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Event from Book	Types of Connections: - Text to self - Text to text - Text to world	Connection
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What has happened previously in the book?	Predict what will happen as the book continues.
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Discuss a character's internal and/or external conflict, and the ways that conflict has influenced or will influence his or her actions.

Reporter Role Sheet

Name:		Book:	
Group:		Pages:	

Your job is to identify and report on the key points of the assigned section. Make a list or write a summary that describes how the writer develops the setting, plot, and characters in this section of the book. Share your report at the beginning of the group meeting to help your group focus on the key ideas presented in the reading. Like that of a newspaper reporter, your report must be concise, yet thorough.

Setting (Consider shifts in the setting or mood that seem significant.)
Plot (Consider major events that occurred in the assigned section.)
Characters (Consider how characters interact and how characters have changed.)

Artist Role Sheet

Name:		Book:	
Group:		Pages:	

Your job is to create an illustration related to the reading. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flow chart, or other depiction. You can choose to illustrate a scene, an idea, a symbol, or a character. Consider how to use color in your illustration for effect. Write a reflection that explains your graphic, symbolic connections, or connections between images and the literature. Show your illustration to the group without any explanation. Ask each group member to respond, either by making a comment or asking a question. After everyone has responded, then you may explain your illustration and answer any questions that have not been answered.

Double-Entry Journal

While you are reading your Literature Circle novel, you will be expected to record entries in a double-entry journal. You may include interesting quotations from the text, questions about the text, and connections between the text and your own life. During your literature circle discussion, you will trade journals with another group member, and respond to his/her entry under the Peer Response. You may then use these entries as talking points within your group discussion.

Text and Page Number (Paraphrase or quote a meaningful passage.)	Response (Analyze the text, form a personal connection, or pose a thoughtful question.)	Peer Response (Ask another group member to make a comment here.)

Reading Schedule

Now that you have a group and a novel to read within your Literature Circle, your group will formulate a plan for reading and discussing the book. With the help of your teacher and the collaboration of your group, decide on the schedule you will follow for reading and discussion.

Title of Book: _____

Author: _____ Total Number of Pages: _____

Date Assigned	Date Due	Pages to Read	Role	Number of Journal Entries

Discussion Notetaking Graphic Organizer

Listening is an important part of a group discussion. Taking notes during group discussions can help you be an active listener. Use the notetaking graphic organizer below as your group engages in Literature Circle discussions.

An Interesting Point Made by a Member of My Group	Support the Person Provided	My Thoughts

Group Meeting Reflection Sheet

This reflection sheet is designed to help you identify what is going well and what needs to be improved before the next meeting. This is to be completed at the conclusion of each literature circle discussion. Only one is needed per group, but all members must contribute to it.

Date: _____ Book: _____ Pages: _____

Discussion Leader:	Diction Detective:
Bridge Builder:	Reporter:
Artist:	

	Challenges	Goals
Speaking		
Listening		
Understanding the Text		