Literature Circle Overview

Definition

“A literature circle is a students’ equivalent in the classroom of an adult book club. The aim is to encourage student-choice and a love of reading in young people. The true intent of Literature Circles is “to allow students to practice and develop the skills and strategies of good readers” (DaLie, 2001).”

Literature circles were first implemented in 1982 by Karen Smith, an elementary school teacher in Phoenix, Arizona. Smith observed that her fifth grade students were very engaged and enjoyed discussing novels when they loosely organized themselves into reading groups to read books that had been donated to the classroom. (Daniels, 1994).

Key features of literature circles

- Children choose their own reading materials.
- Small temporary groups are formed, based on book choice.
- Different groups read different books
- Groups meet on a regular predictable schedule.
- Students use written or drawn notes to guide both their reading and discussion.
- Discussion topics come from the students
- Group meetings aim to be open, natural conversations. Often the conversations digress to topics relating to the students or loosely to the books, but should eventually return to the novel.
- The teacher serves as a facilitator, observer, listener and often a fellow reader, alongside the students. The teacher is not an instructor.
- Students are given roles or jobs to complete for each group meeting.
- The teacher should model how students should facilitate each role or job.
- Evaluation is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation and should also include extension projects.
- A spirit of playfulness and fun pervades the room.
- New groups form around new reading choices. (Daniels, 1994)

Qualities of a Good Literature Circle Book

A good literature circle book touches something within the reader's heart and mind and compels response. You can use some fairly simple criteria to help you find such books:

SUBSTANCE
- Does the book arouse my emotions and will it arouse student’s emotions?
- Is the book well written?
- Is the book meaningful?

LAYOUT
- number of pages
- size of print
- inviting space on the page
- use and placement of illustrations.

Literature circles fit into a comprehensive literacy program as one way for students to apply what they are learning about reading and writing:

- Read Aloud
- Independent Reading and Writing
- Opportunities for Application (e.g., literature circles, inquiry study, content area reading and writing)
- Guided Reading and Writing

Visit Jen’s site to learn more:
http://www.oncboces.org/webpages/jen
Click Curriculum Resources > ELA Resources > Reading Resources
How Literature Circles Change Over Time ... The following chart may give you a feel for how literature circles evolve over time as teachers and students themselves change -- gaining experience, confidence, and insights to do things differently. The chart isn’t based on one teacher’s experience, but a composite of some of the possible steps teachers take as they work with literature circles. Think of this as a continuum of development -- flexible and highly subjective. The point of the chart is to show that we all begin somewhere and grow from there!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Some First Steps…</th>
<th>Some Next Steps…</th>
<th>Some Later Steps…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>- There is only one way to do literature circles</td>
<td>- There are many options for literature circles</td>
<td>- This is what works in my classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I have to do them the &quot;right&quot; way</td>
<td>- I'll try out some, refine them, try others</td>
<td>- What works now may not work next week, next year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- My students and I are constantly learning and changing how we do things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>- Learning the structure and survival</td>
<td>- Refining structure</td>
<td>- Developing meaningful response, higher levels of thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Choosing one piece to focus on</td>
<td>- Learning how to discuss</td>
<td>- Integrating lit. circles with other subjects and with themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Adding on components</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Deepening students' understanding of and engagement with literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline</strong></td>
<td>- 3 - 6 weeks; emphasis on learning the process</td>
<td>- 3 - 6 weeks; emphasis on developing response</td>
<td>- 3 - 6 weeks; emphasis on deepening response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3 - 8</td>
<td>- Emphasis on learning the process</td>
<td>- Timeline varies by complexity of books</td>
<td>- Timeline varies by complexity of books, organization of theme/topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scheduling</strong></td>
<td>- Teacher sets schedule (how long cycle will take, how often groups meet, when to present extension projects, etc.) - Groups discuss once a week; read, respond, work on extension projects when not meeting</td>
<td>- Teacher and students determine how long cycle will be (how often groups meet, when to present extension projects, etc.) - Groups discuss on student-set schedule; read, respond, work on extension projects when not meeting</td>
<td>- Groups decide how long entire book + extension will take and set own schedule within that time frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 3 - 8</td>
<td>- Whole class reads same book</td>
<td>- Two or three choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Books chosen by teacher</td>
<td>- Books selected because they are engaging, meaningful, and generate strong student interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Read from anthology or - Books selected because &quot;they're what we have&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choosing Books</strong></td>
<td>- Teacher gives book talks - Teacher forms groups - Groups formed by student choice</td>
<td>- Teacher or students give book talks - Groups formed by student choice</td>
<td>- Four or five choices - Books selected because they relate to a theme, topic, genre or author focus and represent good literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Limited choice of response prompts given by the teacher - Students read individually, in pairs, with taped book, with specialist/volunteer support</td>
<td>- Teacher offers choice of a few response prompts - Students and teacher generate possible responses - Students read individually, in pairs, with taped book, with specialist/volunteer support</td>
<td>- Students choose from a menu of ideas -- or their own - Students read individually, in pairs, with taped book, with specialist/volunteer support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Component**
- Teacher Beliefs
- Goals
- Timeline
- Scheduling
- Choosing Books
- Forming Groups
- Reading and Preparing for Discussion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Some First Steps...</th>
<th>Some Next Steps...</th>
<th>Some Later Steps...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussion</strong></td>
<td>- Teacher sets schedule for the whole class</td>
<td>- Groups meet on a rotating basis</td>
<td>- The groups set their own schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher facilitates group; or Teacher participates as group member; or Teacher</td>
<td>- Teacher facilitates group; or Teacher participates as group member; or Teacher</td>
<td>- Teacher facilitates group; or Teacher participates as group member; or Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sits near group but observes; or Students facilitate own group, teacher roams</td>
<td>sits near group but observes; or Students facilitate own group, teacher roams</td>
<td>sits near group but observes; or Students facilitate own group, teacher roams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use roles and forms</td>
<td>- Students generate discussion guidelines; modify/adapt forms</td>
<td>- Modify forms to fit -- or give them up altogether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Written Response</strong></td>
<td>- Limited focus of response prompts given by the teacher</td>
<td>- Teacher offers choice of a few responses</td>
<td>- Students choose from a menu of ideas -- or their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Response to each chapter/book</td>
<td>- A given number of responses per week; written only</td>
<td>- Flexible number of responses per week using a variety of response formats (e.g.,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Try out a few forms</td>
<td>- Modify/adapt forms</td>
<td>written and art)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Modify or dispense with forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus Lessons</strong></td>
<td>- The “how to” of literature circles</td>
<td>- Refining literature circles</td>
<td>- Perfecting literature circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Literacy strategies</td>
<td>- Literacy strategies</td>
<td>- Literacy strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Literary elements</td>
<td>- Literary elements</td>
<td>- Literary elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- and whatever comes up!</td>
<td>- and whatever comes up!</td>
<td>- and whatever comes up!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extension Projects</strong></td>
<td>- Teacher gives one option</td>
<td>- Teacher offers a choice of a few options</td>
<td>- Students select from a menu of options -- or their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher determines if project is group or individual</td>
<td>- Students choose (group or individual)</td>
<td>- Students choose (group or individual)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment and Evaluation</strong></td>
<td>- What assessment?</td>
<td>- Use one or two forms</td>
<td>- Modify forms and develop own instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Try out limited amount of student self-assessment</td>
<td>- Take and use anecdotal notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Students choose a few responses to be graded; begin to evaluate discussion</td>
<td>- Use extensive student self-assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Students still choose a few responses to be graded but greater emphasis put on discussions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relate to Personal Experience:

If I were__________, I would
______________ because_______.

Relate to Personal Experience:

I am a lot like __________
because____________.

Relate to Personal Experience:

This scene in the novel reminds me of
__________.

Relate to Personal Experience:

My experience is similar/different
because _____.

Relate to Personal Experience:

I understand how you feel because
_____.

Relate to Personal Experience:

If I could introduce one character to
my family or friends, it would be
__________.

Go to the Text

What evidence do you have from the
book that leads you to believe
that_____?

Go to the Text

How do you know that_____?

Go to the Text

The author creates conflict when
____________.

Ask a Question:

What do you mean when you say
__________?

Ask a Question:

Why do you think that__________?

Ask a Question:

I think ______ is confusing because
__________.

Ask a Question:

If I could ask __________ one
question, this would be my question:

Express an Opinion:

I agree that _____ because _____.

Express an Opinion:

I like the way the author uses
__________ because__________.

Express an Opinion:

I would be embarrassed to introduce
_____ to my family because_______.

Speculate:

If I could change anything in the story I
would change __________
because__________.
Speculate:
I wish that ________________.

Speculate:
I would like to give the following advice to__________:

Speculate:
If only ___________ had _________ I think he/she would have __________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERACY CIRCLES</th>
<th>LITERACY CIRCLES</th>
<th>LITERACY CIRCLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentence Starters for Discussions</td>
<td>Sentence Starters for Discussions</td>
<td>Sentence Starters for Discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
<td>LITERACY CIRCLES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
<td>ROLES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Illustration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summarizer</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Illustrator" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Investigator" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Character" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educator</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Educator" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Tracker</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Travel Tracker" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracker</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Tracker" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary Enricher</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Enricher" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connector</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Connector" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Director</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Director" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion Director

Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book and direct the discussion by asking each member for their input based on their current role.

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, which you can list during or after your reading.
Travel Tracker

In a book where characters move around a lot and the scenes change frequently, it is important for everyone in your group to know where things are happening and how the setting may have changed. Even if the scenery doesn’t change much, the setting is still a very important part of the story.

Your job is to track where the action takes place. Describe each setting in detail, either in words or with a picture map that you can show and discuss with your group. Be sure to give the page numbers.
Literary Luminary

Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that you think your group would like to read aloud. Choose passages that will help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text.

You decide which pages or paragraphs are worth hearing, and then jot plans for how they should be shared. You can read the passages aloud yourself, or ask someone else to read them, then discuss them as a group.
Your job is to prepare a brief summary of the daily reading. Your group discussion will start with your 1-2 minute statement that covers the key points, main highlights, general idea and essence of each day’s reading assignment.
Investigator

Your job is to dig up some background information on the book and any topic related to it. Use whatever means you have at your disposal.

This is NOT a formal research project. The idea is to find information that interests you and helps the group to better understand the characters, setting and plot of the book.
Connector

Your job is to connect the contents of the reading selection to current or past real world events and experiences.

You will also connect the reading to other forms of literature, music, art and/or media.
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's discussed specifically in your book, or 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.
Vocabulary Enricher

Your job is to find at least 2 new words from your reading assignment. You will look up the definition of each word and teach the words to your team. To do this you will read the sentence from the book and share the meaning of the word. Then, everyone will write the words and meanings in their journals or on their worksheets.
Character Educator

Your job is to identify the character traits of the main character(s) and state your proof to support your ideas. The following ten character attributes may give you some ideas to work with:

- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Cooperation
- Caring
- Respect
- Optimisms
- Honesty
- Empathy
- Courage
- Inclusiveness
Discussion Director

Name: _______________________________________
Book: _______________________________________
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 and direct the discussion by asking each member for their input based on their current role. 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, which you can list below, during or after your reading.

**Possible discussion questions or topics for today:**

1. _________________________________________________________
2. ___________________________________________________________________
3. ___________________________________________________________________
4. _______________________________________________________
5. ___________________________________________________________________

**Sample Questions:**
What was going through your mind while you read this section?
What questions did you have when you finished this section?
Did anything in this section surprise you?
Can anyone predict what will happen next?

**Connections:** What did today’s reading remind you of?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p ______
Travel Tracker

Name: _____________________________________
Book: _____________________________________
Date: _____________________________________
Assignment: pages _____ to _____

**Travel Tracker:** Your job is to carefully track where the action is happening in today’s reading. Tell the group where the characters have moved to and from and describe each setting in detail either in words or in map form. Be sure to give the page locations where the scene is described.

**Where today’s action begins:** ________________________________________

page _____

**Where key events happen:** ________________________________________

page _____

**Where today’s action ends:** ________________________________________

page _____

**Connections:** What did today’s reading remind you of?

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p _____
Wordsmith: Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that you think your group would like to read aloud. The idea is to help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the text. You decide which passages or paragraphs are worth hearing, and then jot plans for how they should be shared. You can read the passages aloud yourself, or ask someone else to read them, then discuss them as a group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Reason for Picking</th>
<th>Plan for Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Page _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paragraph _____</td>
<td>__________________</td>
<td>__________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reasons for picking a passage:  important  surprising  funny  confusing  controversial  informative

Powerful Vocabulary: List new words and their meaning.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

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

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p _____
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, general idea and essence of today's reading assignment.

Summary:
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Key Points:
1. ______________________________________________________
2. ______________________________________________________
3. ______________________________________________________
4. ______________________________________________________

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

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p _____
**Investigator**

Name: ___________________________________________

Book: ___________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________

Assignment: pages _____ to _____

---

**Investigator:** Your job is to dig up some background information on the book and any topic related to it. Use whatever means you have at your disposal.

**Suggested areas of research:**

- The geography, weather, culture and history of the book’s setting.
- Information about the author, her/his life, and other works.
- Information about the period portrayed in the book.
- Pictures, objects, or materials that illustrate elements of the book.
- Music that reflects the book or the period.

**This is NOT a formal research project. The idea is to find information that interests you and helps the group to better understand the characters, setting and plot of the book.**

**Connections:** What did today’s reading remind you of?

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

---

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p _____
Connector: Your job is to connect the contents of the reading selection to current or past real world events and experiences. You will also connect the reading to other forms of literature, music, art and/or media.

Real World Connections: Relate current reading to real situations.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Experiences: Relate current reading to real experiences you or others have had.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Literature and Media Connections: Relate current reading to other books, movies, art, television, music and other media.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p _____
Illustrator

Name: ___________________________________
Book: ___________________________________
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's discussed specifically in your book, or 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.**

Presentation Plan: When the Discussion Director invites your participation, you may show your picture without comment to the others in the group. One at a time, they get to speculate what your picture means, to connect the drawing to their own ideas about the reading. After everyone has had a say, you get the final word: tell them what your picture means, where it came from, or what it represents to you.

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

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Assignment for tomorrow: p _____ - p _____
Vocabulary Enricher: Your job is to find at least 2 new words from your reading assignment. You will look up the definition of each word and teach the words to your team. To do this you will read the sentence from the book and share the meaning of the word. Then, everyone will write the words and meanings in their journals or on their worksheets.

Powerful Vocabulary: List new words and their meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word: __________________________</th>
<th>Word: __________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning: ______________________</td>
<td>Meaning: ______________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing:</td>
<td>Drawing:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Assignment for tomorrow: p ______ - p ______
**Character Educator**: Your job is to identify the character traits of the main character(s) and state your proof to support your ideas. Use the ten attributes from the Character Education posters for suggestions.

List the main character’s traits and give a reason for your answer.

_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

**Rate your participation:**
(Circle)
1 2 3 4  I read the required pages
1 2 3 4  My research stimulated discussion
1 2 3 4  I asked other members to comment
1 2 3 4  I participated in the discussion