Literature Circles in the Primary Grades

EDP 625 Summer 2008
Prof. Morano
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**Identifying Information**

This lesson was prepared for a first grade academy style class as a result of needing to provide enrichment activities for this excelled class. Most of the students in this class are between the ages of 6 and 7. The reading levels of the class range from an e-class level J through level P with P being substantially above first grade. The students show a great deal of strength in their verbal skills hence the reasoning for the use of the Literature Circle strategy. While these students are performing above grade level and do possess many strengths, they do also have some areas they are in need of improvement. Some of the weaknesses noted with the students include a moderate level of comprehension as well as limited ability to speak using complete sentences.

**Strategy Focus**

The strategy focus for each Literature Circle can vary from circle to circle and from text to text. One main strategy is to assess comprehension through responses to the literature. By having the students complete a graphic organizer or make a response in a reading notebook you can focus on strategies such as sequencing skills, text to self connections, beginning, middle, end, and the understanding of literary elements including characters, setting, problem, solution. Other strategy focus points that can be addressed are to discuss, define, and explore unfamiliar words, make predictions using prior knowledge and supporting details of the text, ask relevant and focused questions to clarify understanding and assess comprehension, have students engage in accountable talk and
group discussion, and paraphrasing, as well as summarizing information to assess comprehension. By selecting different strategies for each literature circle, you will be following the curriculum for differentiated instruction. For the purposes of this discussion the strategy focus was text to self connections, however, a number of other strategies listed above, while secondary in nature, find their way into this lesson.

**Goals/Outcome**

The use of literature circles in the classroom offers students another way to engage in critical thinking. Through the participation in literature circles students get the opportunity to reflect on what it is they are reading by discussing the content with their peers. Students will be able to reframe their thinking and increase their understanding through constructing meaning. The involvement in a literature circle can also further the students understanding of subject matter through facilitated discussion adding to the child’s potential for improved written as well as artistic responses. As an added result, we hope the students develop a love of reading and develop additional skills and strategies that we find among good readers.

**Procedures**

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**DAY 1**

1. Introduce literature circles by explaining that they are groups of people reading the same book and meeting together to discuss what they have read.
2. Emphasize the student-centered collaborative nature of this strategy by discussing how the strategy places students in charge of leading their own discussions as well as making decisions for themselves.
3. Using a group of student, model some of the ways that students will work independently for example have one child select a text. Then have another
student select a question that the group will discuss about the text, and remind students that only one person is speaking at a time.

4. Introduce the literature circle roles to the class, and answer any questions that students have about these roles. They can include leader, listeners, manager, timer or timer keeper, encourager and summarizer. (modified for individual classrooms)

5. Select the members to be included in each Literature Circle. These students will be grouped by reading ability.

**DAY 2**

6. Recall expectations of student interaction during their Literature Circle Time. (One speaker at a time, explain your thinking, stay on the topic or discussion, listen to whom even is speaking)

7. Assign roles for the members of each circle.

8. Assign the reading selection for each group.

9. Provide a list of discussion questions for the students to choose from. For this first grade class, specific discussion questions were selected and placed on index cards in order to direct and differentiate instruction.

10. Have the students complete the reading selection and wait for the others to catch up. (Depending on adaptations for individual classrooms this can also be conducted as a homework assignment to be further discussed at a later date)

11. Facilitate the circle discussion by preparing the students for their roles by reminding them of the components of their role.

12. Students conduct the practical part of the Literature Circle roles with limited teacher direction.

**Materials**

Multiple copies of *The Talent Contest* written by Jenny Giles
Literature Circle Roles
Literature Circle Role Sheets
Literature Circle Reflection Sheet (text to self Graphic organizer for this lesson)

**Additional Curriculum Areas**

The selection of the text is how we can determine if other curriculum areas are being targeted. Non Fiction books can be selected depending upon the mapping of your curriculum. Science based books as well as Social Studies books can also be selected.
Additionally, an artistic response can be required of any text which may include a
drawing, painting, or collage to name a few.

The text selection for this assignment could offer cross curriculum integration in
writing. For example, should you request the students to produce a narrative account of
their text to self connection they would be meeting New York State Writing Standards.
For the purposes of this assignment there was no cross curricular integration. The
assessment portion of the activity was a response to reading via text to self graphic
organizer allowing 5 individual reading standards to be addressed.

**Learning Outcome**

As this lesson was done with an academy first grade class the primary outcome was
to work on building the students comprehension skills. In addition, it is an excellent way
to build vocabulary. At the same time an additional outcome was to have the students
develop their verbal skills. The text used gave us the opportunity to make real life text to
self connections. By being able to make a connection to their own life, there would need
to be moderate to complete comprehension of the topic at hand as well of discussion of
same. The use of this strategy also provides a venue for the student to have fun sharing
their own experiences staying consistent with the goals of Harvey Daniels’ “*Literature
Circle: 11 Key Ingredients*” adapted from Literature Circles and Choice in Book Clubs
and Reading Groups by Harvey Daniels. Of the utmost importance was the fact this unit
of study gave these advanced students the ability to “direct” their own learning. As in all
literature circles the students lead the lesson and the teacher is a facilitator for same.
Mastery of these expected outcomes will establish the tools needed to conduct further Literature Circles with more detail.

**Background Information**

Literature circles have been in the classroom since approximately 1982. They were first implemented by a fifth grade elementary school teacher from Phoenix Arizona named Karen Smith. She was given a box of novels by a fellow teacher which she placed in her room and quickly forgot about them, some of her students were interested in the novels and began reading them and discussing them. Ms. Smith was intrigued by their level of interest in not only the books but the discussions that ensued. Hence the basis of the literature circle was created.

Today literature circles have evolved into a reading, study and discussion group. The students are placed into small groups to read and discuss a novel. The teacher is not part of the literature circle rather he/she is a facilitator. The purpose of a literature circle is to engage students in critical thinking as they read and discuss a book.

The literature circle is usually introduced via a mini lesson, so the students are aware of what is expected of them. Generally there are several roles within the circle. The teacher through a mini lesson can explain what each role entails. It is then the student’s job to carry out their role during the circle. Literature circles are very structured and a fun way to get your students reading. Of course a literature circle cannot be used as and for the core curriculum but rather as an enhancement/enrichment to same.

You can have as few as 4 roles in a literature circle or as many as 10. The common roles utilized in a literature circle are discussion director, summarizer, illustrator
and word wizard. I have also seen groups utilize other roles such as a character caption, alternate facilitator and a connector.

**Standards**

*E1a Read twenty five books of the quality and complexity illustrated in the sample reading list.
*E1b Read and comprehend at least four books on the same subject, or by the same author, or in the same genre.
*E2b Produce a response to literature.
*E3b Participate in a group meeting.
*E5a Respond to non-fiction, fiction, poetry, and drama using interpretive and critical process

**Reflection**

I did not have the opportunity to do this lesson with my class. Unfortunately I had a bottom third grade class. Their ability coupled with the fact I was in a testing grade made this something I could not accomplish during the school year. I would love to have done something like this with my class because I feel that towards the end of the year it would have been a wonderful way to unwind from our test prep schedule while still providing my students with the ability to improve their reading ability. It is my hope that I may be able to implement a literature in my classroom in the future as I think it would be a welcome change to the normal reader’s workshop lesson. I also find the students are always more engaged when they are active participants in the lesson. (Submitted by Donna M. Zucconi)

Having had the opportunity to conduct Literature Circles in my classroom, I was able to see how the interaction among the students occurred. While at first, a slight reminder was required so that each member remembered their role; their take charge
attitude was refreshing compared to the daily turn to your partner engagements. Because of the nature of the class, meaning the students were more excelled than others, they were able to articulate themselves and build upon the thoughts of others using accountable talk. On the second day of the procedure, the students were able to make their responses to reading and enjoyed doing so especially knowing they would be able to share with the whole class their account. The final assessment came when the students began to express their excitement about the next text they would be able to read in the same manner. The enjoyment and enthusiasm as well as their accurate text to self connections was substantial enough to realize that this particular strategy can be extremely useful and fun to utilize more regularly in the classroom. It is important to understand that although this particular strategy takes a bit of strategic planning, patience and practice, once the students are in the habit of working in this way, the opportunity to offer differentiated instruction can increase dramatically allowing us as teachers to reach a greater number of children. (Reflection submitted by Nicole Nigro)

**Resources/Works Cited**

Daniels, Harvey “*Literature Circle: 11 Key Ingredients*” adapted from Literature Circles and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups

Giles, Jenny  *The Talent Contest*  Thomas Learning, Australia 2000


[http://litsite.alaska.edu/workbooks/circle/role.html](http://litsite.alaska.edu/workbooks/circle/role.html)  July 6, 2008