



Literature Circles in the Middle and High School Classroom

Resource Guide

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INTRODUCTION

This is what we'll cover:

- Background information about Literature Circles
- Getting started with Literature Circles in the classroom
- Creating and structuring mini-lessons

WHAT ARE LITERATURE CIRCLES?

- It's a translation of the adult reading group.
- Offers a genuine and authentic reading experience.
- Literature Circles are also known as book clubs and reading groups.

Literature Circle Consistent Elements

- Students choose their reading materials.
Novels, short stories, poetry or plays – important to offer a wide range of material.
Looking for reading material? <http://www.alan-ya.org>
- Small Groups are formed, based on student choice.
- Grouping is by text choices, not by “ability” or other tracking.
- Groups meet on a regular schedule.
- Different groups choose and read different books.
TIP: first time through all students use the same book – teach students the structure of Literature Circles.
- Members write notes that help guide both their reading and their discussion.
We'll see this demonstrated later in a video from a classroom in Allegany County, MD
- Teacher-led Mini Lessons should be scheduled before and after literature circle meetings.
- The teacher does not lead any book, but acts as a facilitator, fellow reader, and observer.
- Personal responses, connections, and questions are the starting point of discussion.
- The classroom has a spirit of playfulness, sharing, and collaboration.
- When books are completed, the literature circles share highlights of their reading through presentations, reviews, dramatizations, book chats and other activities.
- New groups are formed around new reading choices and the cycle begins again.
Common question: how often should I do a Literature Circle?
Answer: depends on school schedule, many teachers do at least 10/year.
- Assessment is by teacher observation and student self-evaluation.
We'll discuss assessment at length at the end of the session.

MINI LESSONS

All Mini Lessons can cover the following:

- Team building
- Reading strategies
- Literary strategies

Mini Lessons - Team Building

Team Building Mini Lessons teach social skills so that the students can collaborate in a literature circle.

What are some obstacles you may encounter?

Typical adolescent behaviors: one kid doesn't want to work with another kid, communication problems like one kid taking too much control, other kids reluctant to participate, etc.

How can you overcome those obstacles?

Devote first few mini-lessons to learning social skills

How do you build classroom community?

Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke

The Second City Guide to Improv in the Classroom by Katie McKnight & Mary Scruggs

Note group brainstorming ideas here:

No wrong ideas – anything that builds a classroom environment where kids feel comfortable talking to each other.

Mini Lessons – Reading and Literary Strategies

A Reading Strategy or Literary Strategy Mini Lesson provides direct, explicit instruction for one specific teaching point.

Called Mini Lesson for a reason - need to be short. Aim for 5 minutes.

The structure of an effective Mini Lesson is as follows:

- 1)** Connect lesson with lesson from the day before - stating what will be learned and setting the purpose.
- 2)** Teach the new strategy using a mentor text and modeling with think aloud. Be very explicit and model what proficient readers do to comprehend text.

Reading Strategies

Visualize - Making pictures of mental images or sensory images as they read.

Student Sample from Tuck Everlasting (appears below in handout).

Connect - The reader and experience connection.

Student Sample Stop and Write from Book Thief (appears below in handout).

Note personal point of view in "What I'm Thinking" section: uses words I, me, my.

Question - Interrogating the text.

Infer - predict, interpret, synthesize.

Evaluate - Critique and make judgments.

Analyze - Examining the author's craft.

Good time for mini-lessons about literary elements.

Recall - Retell, summarize, and remember.

Self Monitor - Using individual skill set to understand and interpret the text.

Overcoming obstacles independently.

Mini Lessons – Examples of Reading Strategies

Sticky Notes

We want students to listen to the voice in their heads.

They should record these comments, questions and connections on sticky notes.

Visit this site for guides, assessments and student samples:

Source: ReadWriteThink.org

www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=1132

Stop and Write

Students stop and write.

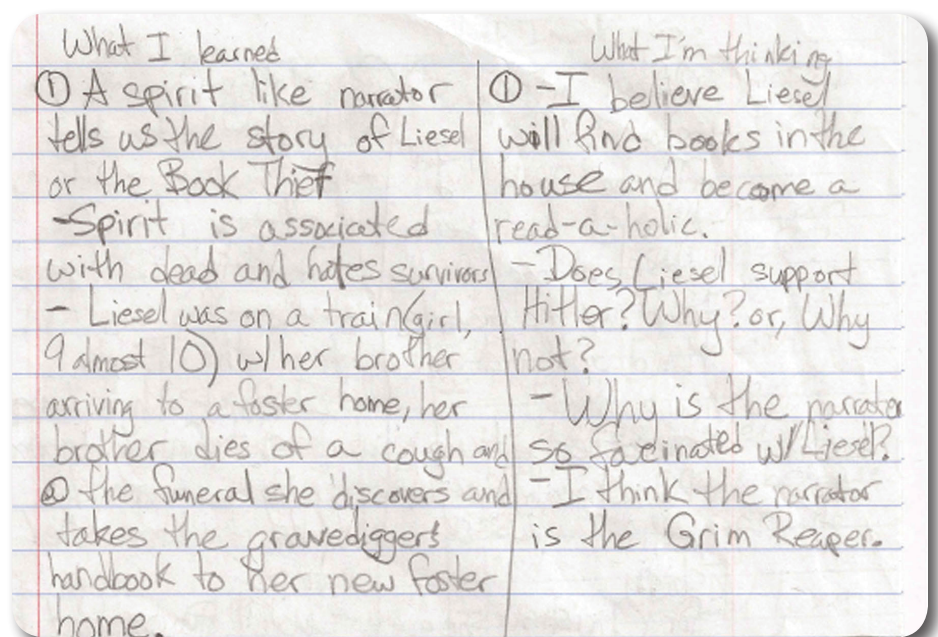
Typical Assignment:

Students need to read a certain number of pages tonight and do ten stop and writes.

First, they should summarize, "What I read".

Second, they should reflect, "What I think".

See student sample Stop and Write (from *The Book Thief*) at right:

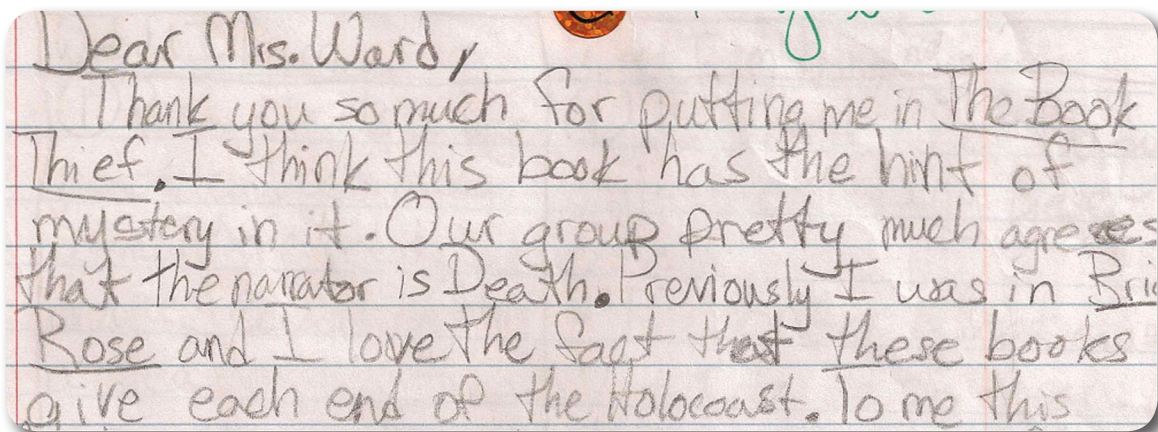


Mini Lessons – Examples of Literary Strategies

Literary Letters

- Reader writes letters to teacher, other readers, or friends and relatives outside of the classroom.
- Provides students with the opportunity to consider their own questions, comments, and connections with another person.

See student sample Letter to Teacher below:



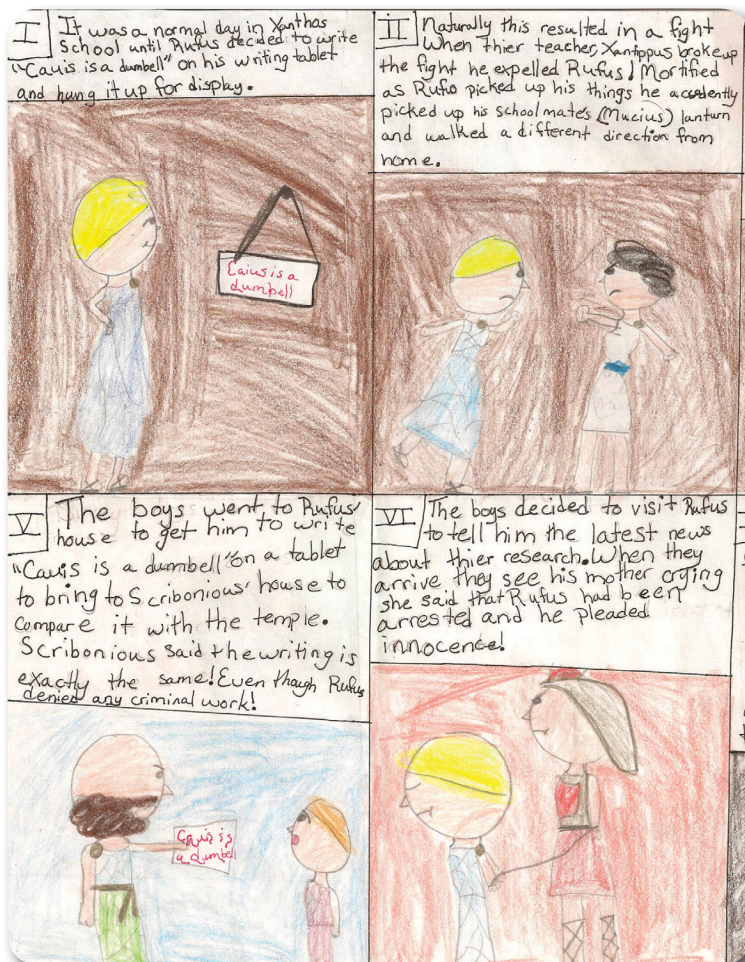
Story Trails

Can do as a group or independently.
TIP: can use index cards instead of story board frames, gives students flexibility to remove/add/rearrange later.

- Another term for “Story Boards”
- Use students’ own words and illustrations

TIP: More detailed illustrations = greater comprehension

See student sample (from *Detectives in Togas*) at right:



Newspaper Story

See student sample Newspaper Story (from *Tuck Everlasting*) at right:

Questioning the Author

Prompts the reader to consider the novel from the writer's point of view. Explain to students that one way to understand a difficult text is to think of questions that they would ask the author. Then select a passage 1-2 paragraphs long. Model the technique for the students by thinking aloud.

- What is the author trying to say here?
- What is the main message or purpose?
- Is the author expressing clear ideas?
- Is this consistent with what the author already said?
- What does the author think we already know?
- Has the author achieved the goal?

The Treegap News



Mae Tuck at Large!

Normally nothing really happens in our sleepy little town but this week one woman committed three criminal acts. First she kidnapped local Winnie Foster. We went to the Foster's to get the scoop. "People keep on asking me if they tortured me or hurt me, but the Tuck's were kind. They fed me flapjacks and gave me a place to sleep." Her grandmother believes that she is bewitched by elves and I couldn't agree more."

After the kidnapping, Mrs. Tuck murdered Mr. Fredrick Flinkenburg, also known as the man in the yellow suit. Tomorrow he will be buried. Mae Tuck is wanted if you catch her your reward is \$1,000.



like a making the statement

Title:

Character:	My Name:
(Draw the character)	(Draw a picture of you)
How the character and I are the same.	
How the character and I are different.	

Compare Myself to a Character

When students make a strong connection to the character and text that they are reading. It leads to greater comprehension.

Review the definition of character. Then have the students select a character from the novel and complete the chart at left:

Mini Lessons - Additional Examples

- Character Biographies
- Character Questionnaire
Pretend you're going to interview a character on a talk show, plan questions.
- Story Cubes
3-dimensional model of 6-sided cube, each side shows different literary elements: plot, characters, theme, point-of-view, etc.
- Note group brainstorming ideas here:
No wrong answers here. These are things you're already teaching. Now you're just breaking lessons down into small chunks and incorporating them into Literature Circle structure.

READING LOGS

Reading Logs are not the same as Mini Lessons, they're in addition to Mini Lessons.

Running record of a student's experience with the book. Could be collection of Stop and Writes, Literary Letters, etc. Can be done in class or as homework.

- Students should write in the log every time that they read.
- Emphasis is on analysis and discussion. Avoid excessive summarizing.
- The teacher or a student peer can respond to the reader's entries.

See student sample Reading Log entries on the following page:

Character Communications

Room 201

Dear Catherine,

I believe you are a woman who is far ahead of your time and is strong, witty, and very feminist and I like that. I think you are very clever, excuse me my name is Ellie and I feel like I'm a lot like you. I feel like you need to be more confident and you are not a goose you are an eagle or a handsome bird of prey. I believe that because you feed on evil suitors as if they were worms. I believe you should

make a crusade, I'd gladly join you. I do wish that I could see you in this time where women were respected and you of all people would be successful. I believe you could become President of the United States. My country founded after yours.

Lots of Love and
Confidence,

Dear Catherine,

Quite a bit has happened since we last wrote! I think that prank you played was hilarious! I also thought the sheep maddash was also amusing! I do feel worried for your uncle and I think that you should not have cast that spell on Aiela and your uncle, it was obvious they were in love! I hope you're well and I feel that you still need to rethink that spell. I'd ask Morweena for a reverse that spell.

Wishing you Well,

LITERATURE CIRCLE ROLES

Discussion Director

- creates questions to increase comprehension
All group members suggest questions, Discussion Director fine-tunes them.
- asks who, what, why, when, where, how, and what if

Vocabulary Enricher

- clarifies word meanings and pronunciations
- uses research resources

Literary Luminary

- guides oral reading for a purpose
- examines figurative language, parts of speech, and vivid descriptions

Checker

- checks for completion of assignments
- evaluates participation
- helps monitor discussion for equal participation

Source: ReadWriteThink.org

www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson19/lit-circle-roles.pdf

SCHEDULING

2.5 weeks is **PLENTY** of time for the students to read the assigned book.

- 5-10 minutes-introductory mini lesson
- 20-30 minutes-small group activity
- 5-15 minutes-sharing time and closing.
- About 2-4 weeks is enough per book.
- Meet about 3-6 times per 2-4 week cycle.

See a sample schedule of a first week of Literature Circles below:

Monday	General Class Expectations and Overview Purpose of Literature Circles Discuss Assessment and Evaluation Discuss how to select a book Students should complete the reading survey and book choices.
Tuesday	Mini Lesson: Think Pair Share with Reading Survey Give the students folders that will be used for their literature circles. Discussions Explain how to complete a quick write
Wednesday	Explain how to check in and out books Lit Circle groups should divide the book into pages for homework Discussions Mini Lesson: Explain the reading log and model HW-Read
Thursday	Mini Lesson: Reading Strategies: How to Fix it When I'm stuck Discussion HW-Read
Friday	Mini Lesson: Character Quote Discussion HW: Read

BEYOND THE ROLE SHEETS

Literature Circles: Original Model

- Mini Lesson
- Literature Circles Meet
- Roles: Connector, Director, Vocabulary Enricher, Illustrator

Daniels, H. (1994). Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom. Stenhouse Publishers: York, Maine.

Literature Circles: Differentiated Instruction Emphasis

- Mini Lessons
- Learning Centers

McKnight, K (2009). Literature Circles in the Middle and High School Classroom. National Council of Teachers of English. Webinar presented on November 4, 2009.

LITERATURE CIRCLE LEARNING CENTERS

Learning Centers can replace Literature Circle Roles.

Set up all stations and students cycle through them (in their groups). They move from station to station and do a different task at each one. Allow 2-3 days.

- Listening Station
- Story Trails
- Vocabulary Detectives
- Discussion, "Whatcha think?"
- Character Analysis
- Illustration Station

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION FOR LITERATURE CIRCLES

See sample Reading Contract below:

SAMPLE Reading Contract

First Quarter

Teacher _____

Student _____

Expectations and Guidelines:

1. Be prepared (have book in class, any notes, questions and thoughts about your reading).
2. Work with your group at each learning station in class.
3. Choose and submit a final project for the novel that you read in your literature circle.

I _____ will read _____ novels this quarter.

I will read the following:

Book One *1984*, George Orwell

Book Two *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser

Book Three *Hunger Games*, Suzanne Collins

Projects

Book One: Create a scrapbook for the main character in 1984.

Book Two: A nutritional brochure that could be distributed to other high school students that contains information from *Fast Food Nation*

Book Three: A news report (in I Movie format) based on key events in *The Hunger Games*.

Due Date _____

Signatures

See sample Rubric below:

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Project Appearance	Project is exceptionally neat, organized, and visually appealing.	Project is neat and organized.	Project is not neat or organized and could use some work on visual appeal.
Project Creativity	Creativity is noteworthy. Idea is innovative and/or artistically constructed.	Expresses knowledge in a creative and productive manner.	Project does not show much effort.
Project Effort	Project is above and beyond the requirements. Excessive effort.	Student met criteria for final project.	Personal best is not evident.
Literary Elements: Plot, Setting, Characters, Point of View, Theme	All literary elements are included, clearly explained, and supported with specific examples from the text.	All literary elements are included in the project and presentation.	Some literary elements are not included and do not have consistent support.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Emphasize value of student-centered classroom discussion instead of teacher-centered classroom discussion.

Students in charge of their own learning read because they enjoy it.

Students who enjoy reading become lifelong learners – and that's the goal!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Forty-five short, focused, and practical lessons

Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke

Active and engaging strategies for reading and literary analysis Mini Lessons

Teaching the Classics in the Inclusive Classroom: Reader Response Activities to Engage All Learners by Katherine S. McKnight and Bradley P. Berlage M.A.T.

Activities to build classroom community

The Second City Guide to Improv in the Classroom: Using Improvisation to Teach Skills and Boost Learning by Katherine S. McKnight, Ph.D. and Mary Scruggs.

Helping visual learners in reading strategies and literary responses

The Teacher's Big Book of Graphic Organizers: 100 Reproducible Organizers that Help Kids with Reading, Writing, and the Content Areas by Katherine S. McKnight.

Sample lessons plus classroom ideas and instructional strategies

Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools (5th Edition) by Rhoda Maxwell, Mary Meiser and Katherine S. McKnight.

Looking for books for your students?

www.alan-ya.org

This website features authors and titles for adolescent readers. Books are reviewed monthly. The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents is an independent assembly of NCTE. Founded in November 1973, ALAN is made up of teachers, authors, librarians, publishers, teacher-educators and their students, and others who are particularly interested in the area of young adult literature. ALAN, which is self-governing, holds its annual meetings during the NCTE annual convention in November and also publishes The ALAN Review.



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