Welcome to our web page! Our web page discusses how to successfully implement literature circles in the classroom. The following information is provided to get you started:

- Why those of us choose to use literature circles in our classrooms
- An explanation of literature circles
- What literature circles are and what they are not
- A list of student roles with a brief synopsis of each
- A variety of worksheets that explain the requirements of each role
- An explanation and examples of how to assess students’ progress
- A list of sources we found to be exceptionally helpful in our research

Why do teachers implement literature circles in their classrooms?

Many reading and literature teachers are looking for ways to get kids excited about books and making connections to the reading. They are also struggling to try to meet the needs of students with diverse reading abilities within one classroom. The small group discussion structure of literature circles provides a method to meet both of these goals.
Literature circles are different from traditional literature study because they are much more student-directed and authentic. Just as adults do, the children choose their reading material. Usually they choose within a group of books selected by the teacher. Real people read and discuss what interests, excites, puzzles, or provokes them. They don’t read and then take a 50 question multiple choice test. In the real world, people discuss information and issues and this is what happens in literature circles. In this way, students become much more engaged and connected to the text and use higher-level critical thinking skills than they would if they were just trying to come up with the answer that a teacher wanted to hear.

The goal of this web page is to provide teachers with information and resources to allow them to efficiently utilize literature circles in their classrooms. We highly recommend reading Harvey Daniels’ excellent guide, *Literature Circles, Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*. You may read the entire text online at www.stenhouse.com/0336.htm

**What are literature circles?**

1. Students **choose** their own reading materials.

2. **Small temporary groups** are formed, based upon book choice.

3. Different groups read **different books**.

4. Groups meet on a **regular, predictable schedule** to discuss their reading.

5. Kids use written or drawn **notes** to guide both their reading and discussion.

6. Discussion **topics come from the students**.

7. Group meetings aim to be **open, natural conversations about books**, so personal connections, digressions, and open-ended questions are welcome.

8. In newly-forming groups, students may play a rotating assortment of task **roles**.

9. The teacher serves as a **facilitator**, not a group member or instructor.

10. Evaluation is by **teacher observation and student self-evaluation**.

11. A spirit of **playfulness and fun** pervades the room.

12. When books are finished, readers **share with their classmates**, and then **new groups form** around new reading choices.

From www.literaturecircles.com
Literature Circles are . . . | Literature Circles are not . . .
--- | ---
Reader response centered | Teacher and text centered
Part of a balanced literacy program | The entire reading curriculum
Groups formed by book choice | Teacher-assigned groups formed solely by ability
Structured for student independence, responsibility, and ownership | Unstructured, uncontrolled "talk time" without accountability
Guided primarily by student insights and questions | Guided primarily by teacher- or curriculum-based questions
Intended as a context in which to apply reading and writing skills | Intended as a place to do skills work
Flexible and fluid; never look the same twice | Tied to a prescriptive "recipe"

From *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe & Nancy J. Johnson © 1999 Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

What roles do students employ in literature circles?

Students in literature circles are assigned specific roles to help them analyze the text. Literature circles are a fairly simple structure, but teachers need to be aware that they will have to dedicate time to teaching the process and procedure to students. Teachers will still need to facilitate and monitor the quality of the discussions.

The five roles provided below are a basic outline for discussing works of fiction. Countless variations are available to suit a specific text or purpose for reading. There are also roles designed for non-fiction texts. Many teachers use these roles as template or jumping off point to create their own roles:

**Discussion Director**: Facilitates the group discussion and engages all group members by generating questions about the reading. The questions should not focus on minor details, but should direct the group toward the themes found in the literature. The director may come up with questions based on his/her own reactions, questions, and feelings about the literature.

**Literary Luminary**: This group member highlights passages that are worth rereading or paying special attention to. After locating sections of the text that are interesting, puzzling, powerful, funny, or important, the luminary decides whether the passages should be shared through silent reading or reading aloud before they are discussed.

**Illustrator**: The illustrator creates an artistic response to the reading. It can be a sketch, graphic organizer, cartoon, or even a stick figure scene inspired by an event, character, or idea from the reading. After sharing the visual with the discussion group, the artist tells them what the picture represents, or how it relates to the reading.

**Connector**: The connector finds relationships between the text and the outside world. The reading can be connected to the student’s real life, events in school or at home, in other texts that the student has read, current events, or other problems or people that the student is reminded of.
**Summarizer**: The summarizer’s role is to briefly paraphrase the reading, assisting the group in focusing on the main ideas of the specific reading.

**Vocabulary Enricher (Word Wizard)**: This person identifies words that are challenging, new, or interesting and notes where they are found in the text. After making a “best guess” as to what the words mean, the student looks up the words and provides a dictionary definition.

*Some additional roles are the historian (historical fiction), investigator (background information on text or author), character creator, or travel tracer (setting).*

The following role sheets are adaptations of the roles discussed in Harvey Daniels’ book.

**Director**

Name __________________________ Group ______________________________

Book ______________________________ Assignment p _____-p _____

Discussion Director: You job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. 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. Or you may use some of the general questions below to develop topics for your group. You also need to make sure the group stays on task as this will be part of how you are graded.

Possible discussion questions or topics for today:

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Sample questions:

What was going through your mind while you read this?
How did you feel while reading this part of the book?
What was discussed in this section of the book?
Can someone summarize briefly?
Did today's reading remind you of any real-life experiences?
What questions did you have when you finished this section?
Did anything in this section of the book surprise you?
What are the one or two most important ideas?
Predict some things you think will be talked about next.

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _________________________

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p _____

**Literary Luminary**

Name _________________________ Group ___________________________
Book ______________________________ Assignment p _____ - p_____

Your job is to locate a few special sections of the text that your group would like to hear read aloud. The idea is to help people remember some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, descriptive, 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 passages aloud yourself, ask someone else to read them, or have people read them silently and then discuss.

Location Reason for Picking Plan for Reading

1. Page
   Paragraph

2. Page
   Paragraph

3. Page
   Paragraph

4. Page
   Paragraph
Possible reasons for picking a passage to be shared:

Important; Informative
Surprising; Controversial
Funny; Well written
Confusing; Thought-provoking
Other:______________________________________________________________

Topic to be carried over to tomorrow ____________________________

Assignment for tomorrow p _____-p_____
Your job is to find connections between the book your group is reading and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to your own life, to happenings at school or in the community, to similar events at other times and places, to other people or problems that you are reminded of. You might also see connections between this book and other writings on the same topic, or by the same author. There are no right answers here-whatever the reading connects you with is worth sharing! Other things you can research include, the geography, weather, culture, or history of the book's setting. Information about the author, her/his life, and other works. Information about the time period portrayed in the book. Pictures, objects, or materials that illustrate elements of the book. The history and derivation of words or names used in the book. Music that reflects the book or the time.

Some connections I found between this reading and other people, places, events, authors...

1. 

2. 

3.
Vocabulary Enricher (Word Wizard)

Name __________________________ Group ______________________________

Book ______________________________ Assignment p _____-p _____

Your job is to be on the lookout for a few especially important words in today’s reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them while you are reading, and then later jot down their definition, either from a dictionary or some other source. You may also run across familiar words that stand out somehow in the reading—words that are repeated a lot, used in an unusual way, or key to the meaning of the text. Mark these special words too, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your circle meets, help members find and discuss these words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Best Guess</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</table>
Topic to be carried over to tomorrow _________________________

Assignment for tomorrow p _____ -p _____

**Summarizer**

Name __________________________ Group ______________________________

Book ______________________________ Assignment p _____ -p _____

Summarizer: Your job is to prepare a brief summary of this section of the reading. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give a quick statement that conveys the gist, the key points, the main highlights, the essence of today’s reading assignment. If there are several main ideas or events to remember, you can use the numbered slots below:

Summary:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
What does a literature circle look like?

Students begin by reading a predetermined amount of text. It is important for all children, regardless of reading level, to have the opportunity to participate in literature discussion. Emergent readers can discuss texts that have been read during shared readings or heard during read-alouds.

Each literature circle lasts approximately 10-20 minutes, depending on the text. Teachers may set a general focus for the discussion (e.g., character description, dialogue, setting), however, discussions should allow for open-ended response. It is important that students feel comfortable sharing ideas and taking risks in the discussions. Teachers should monitor good discussion and questioning behavior.

Good discussion and reflective thinking strategies need to be modeled and practiced with students ahead of time. Teachers may want to have students help generate the guidelines as a class. Some examples of guidelines are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guidelines for Interaction</th>
<th>Guidelines for Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• One speaker at a time.</td>
<td>• Support your ideas using the book. (What words or pictures in the book made you think of your idea? Can you show where in the book it says that?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explain your thinking.</td>
<td>• Support your ideas with your own experience (What happened in your life that is like this situation? Who do you know that is like this character and why?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Let other people talk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Stay on the subject.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Take your turn at listening.</td>
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</table>
How can teachers assess students’ progress in literature circles?

Assessment for literature circles is based on performance. Students may be assessed through written responses to role sheets or reading journals, anecdotal records based on teacher observation of student behavior and participation in the group, and student self and group evaluation. Before beginning literature circles, a teacher needs to decide how he or she wants to evaluate student progress.

Here is an example of a literature circle journal and scoring guide used by Janet Lopez at Dzantik’i Heeni Middle School, Juneau, Alaska:

**Journal**

Name: ____________________  Date: ________________

Pre-group journal entry:

In the space below, please write a summary in 150 words or less, of the material you have read.

In the space below, please write a response to the material you have read.
In the space below, please write a prediction about what you think will happen next.

Post-group entry:

In the space below, please describe how your understanding of the text was enriched by your group discussion.

In the space below, please describe your contribution to the group in the role to which you were assigned today.

Using the descriptors provided in your scoring guide, award yourself a grade for your role sheet and your journal entries. Circle the letter that best describes you in each area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Assessment</th>
<th>Teacher Assessment</th>
<th>Comments:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Sheet:</td>
<td>Role Sheet:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>IP</td>
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<td>Journal:</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>IP</td>
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</table>

**Literature Circles Scoring Guide**

Name: ________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Grades</th>
<th>Exceeds</th>
<th>Meets</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Journal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pre-group journal indicates student:</strong>&lt;br&gt;* Has achieved genuine insights as evidenced by insightful interpretations and evaluations of text&lt;br&gt;* <strong>Post-group journal indicates student:</strong>&lt;br&gt;* Has gained richer understanding of the text through group discussion as evidenced by the depth and clarity of the response&lt;br&gt;* Can evaluate the effectiveness of his/her own contribution to the group discussion</td>
<td><strong>Pre-group journal indicates student:</strong>&lt;br&gt;* Has read text carefully&lt;br&gt;* Has grasped the main ideas&lt;br&gt;* Can offer reasonable if sometimes incomplete or questionable interpretations&lt;br&gt;* Has addressed all required prompts&lt;br&gt;<strong>Post-group journal indicates student:</strong>&lt;br&gt;* Can cite two specific examples that demonstrate a richer understanding of the text after group discussion&lt;br&gt;* Can clearly state his/her contribution to the group within his/her role</td>
<td><strong>Pre-group journal indicates student:</strong>&lt;br&gt;* Student has not read text carefully -- unable to identify main ideas or interpret text&lt;br&gt;* One or more of the required prompts have not been addressed&lt;br&gt;<strong>Post-group journal indicates student:</strong>&lt;br&gt;* Is unable to cite specific examples of growth in understanding the text&lt;br&gt;* Is unable to clearly state the contribution he/she made to the group discussion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Role Sheet** | * All of "Meets"
* Responses to assigned tasks indicate that student has achieved a superior and/or unique understanding of the material read | * Role Sheet is complete
* Responses to assigned tasks indicate that student has an adequate understanding of the material | * Student is unprepared for "Literature Circle Discussion" -- material was not read or Role Sheets were unprepared |
| **Habits of Mind & Work** | * Student never needs reminders from the teacher<br>* Acted as a model to other students | * Texts, journals and Role Sheets are always in hand at the start of class<br>* All deadlines are met | * Deadlines are not met<br>* Texts, Journals and Role Sheets are often missing |
* Encouraged those around him/her to focus on the task at hand
* Highly focused and productive -- took team work seriously

met, Role Sheets and Journals are complete
* Student is usually on-task, and requires little, if any, direction from the teacher
* Worked well in group -- productive and cooperative

* Student needs many reminders to stay on task -- student distracts others
* Often not actively involved in group
* Lack of productivity resulted in independent study

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### Group Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceeds Standards</th>
<th>Meets Standards</th>
<th>In Progress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group Skills:</strong> Habits of Work</td>
<td><strong>Group members:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Group Members:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Worked extremely well</td>
<td>* Worked well</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Provided a model for other students</td>
<td>* Were productive</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Were supportive of one anothers' views</td>
<td>* Met all objectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Planned for next meeting</td>
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From [http://litsite.alaska.edu/uaa/workbooks/circle/scoring.html](http://litsite.alaska.edu/uaa/workbooks/circle/scoring.html)

**Sample teacher observation notesheet to use during literature circles:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Members</th>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Productive/On Task</th>
<th>Bonus Points</th>
<th>Comments/Concerns</th>
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### Sample Role Rotation Worksheet:

**Literature Circle Job Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WW = Word Wizard</th>
<th>LL = Literary Luminary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C = Connector</td>
<td>DD = Discussion Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>S = Summarizer</td>
<td>I = Illustrator</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ROLE</th>
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<th>ROLE</th>
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Sample Cooperative Group Evaluation:

Name __________________________________  Date ___________________

Group members:

1. How well did YOU work in your group today? Give examples of how you contributed. (Give thoughts or ideas that you shared. Did you help to keep the group working? Did you assist in any special way?)

2. Who was one of the most valuable members of the group today? Explain why.

3. Is there anything that happened in your group today that you would like to change? What suggestions do you have for improvement?
Need more help getting started? Look at these great resources.

**Teacher Resources for Literature Circles**

Read more about literature circles: "Literature Circles Build Excitement for Books" by Mary Daniels Brown, published on 8/18/00 on the Education World web site.

**Web Sites**

- **Literature Learning Ladders**: In-depth site developed by Dr. Annette Lamb and Dr. Larry Johnson of Eduscape, a professional development organization for teachers. The site contains links for themed literature units and literature circles.

- **Laura Candler's Literary Lessons**: 4th/5th grade teacher Laura Candler has developed this extensive and useful site describing how she uses literature circles in her intermediate classroom. She includes many forms and guidelines that you can download, as well as book suggestions for intermediate students.

- **Discussion Groups/Literature Circles**: Guidelines from the Montgomery County (Maryland) Public Schools.


- **Themed Literature Units**: Book units organized by theme and grade level (this site is under construction and growing all the time -- if you don't see what you're looking for here, check back periodically). Developed by Katherine L. Schlick Noe, Ph.D. of Seattle University.

- **Children's Literature Resources**: Links to a large number of sites for book lists, book reviews, and instruction with children's literature. Developed by Katherine L. Schlick Noe, Ph.D. of Seattle University.

**Professional Books**

- **Literature Circles in Middle School: One Teacher's Journey** by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Janine A. King (2003, Christopher-Gordon).


- **Getting Started with Literature Circles** by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (1999, Christopher-Gordon).


• *Literature Study Circles in a Multicultural Classroom* by Katharine Davies Samway and Gail Whang (1995, Stenhouse).

From [www.fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/](http://www.fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/)

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### References


