Literature Circles

A Simple, Effective, Low-Cost Activity to Use in Your Classroom

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The activity

This activity allows students to strengthen their reading and analytical skills through the use of group reading. Students develop and practice the skills needed to become stronger readers of both fiction and non-fiction texts as well as an appreciation for reading.

This activity is great for reading, balanced literacy, classroom rituals and routines.

Students will learn

- How to make predictions, connections, and inferences
- How to develop critical questions
- Vocabulary development
- How to summarize text
- Understanding figurative language and imagery

Here's what you do

Resources needed:
- A handout of the different roles.
- Various readings, both fiction and non-fiction. You can use short stories or full novels.
- Optional: Organizer with each role listed and space for the students to write in their information.

Approximate time:
Anywhere from one week to one month – depending on reading choices and student skill level

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Success tips:
- Students will need front end scaffolding for each of the roles, especially those whose reading skills are below grade level.
- I asked students on the first day of the unit what types of readings they would find interesting and tried to find things that fell into those categories. Students were then less inclined to push back about reading.
- Move from group to group to make sure 1) the leader is keeping them on task and 2) Students understand what they read.
- Read everything you are going to give them. I took notes on each story to keep them clear and organized in my head.
- Be ready for push back at the beginning, and use think alouds and other tactics to show students how you read, being very transparent and deliberate about using each of the skills you want them to use.
- I did not start using the optional organizer listed above until half way through the unit. I found that the presentations were more organized and complete after providing it. I also required that the leader be responsible for the organizers at the end of each class so they would have information from absent students when it came time to create their presentations.

Instructions:
1. Introduce Lit Circles to the class. This may take one or two class periods depending on students’ familiarity with the different skills they will be asked to employ. Assign students to the different roles and discuss what each role does and the skill needed to complete each role. Use think out-louds to show examples of how each role is employed. The roles are as follows:
   a. **Leader/Presenter/Organizer**: This person keeps the group on task, stops the group regularly to discuss what is happening in the text to make sure all group members understand and are following along, and presents the group’s poster at the end of the text.
   b. **Predictor**: Student makes and records predictions made while reading. You can decide how many are required based on the length of the text and the skill level of your readers.
   c. **Connector**: Student makes connection to the text from the world, other text, or the text itself to their life. Again number required should be based on length of text and reader skill level.
   d. **Vocab Master**: Student is responsible for recording any vocabulary group members do not know and defining it. They also find synonyms for those words if applicable to build group member vocabulary.
   e. **Image Maker**: This student draws images from the story.
   f. **Questioner**: Student writes a determined amount of “Thick” questions, which are ones that only the author can answer. You would have to discuss the idea of thick and thin questions with the students. Thin
questions are those that can be answered within the text without any real thought, where think questions require some outside knowledge or educated guesses to answer.

**g. Inference Maker:** Student uses outside knowledge to make decisions about characters and plot lines in order to better understand the story. This role needs a lot of guidance and help as most students do not really understand this concept at first. A discussion about character traits is helpful for this role.

**h. Summarizer:** At the end of the story, this student writes as brief of a summary as possible of the story. I challenged my students to try and to summarize in 20-30 words. This is difficult for them at first, but as they do it more often they become better concise writers.

2. It is important that the students regularly switch roles and groups to ensure all skills are practiced by all the students.

3. Provide students with a variety of readings of equal length and different subject matters. Allow students to break into groups based on the stories they choose.

4. Keep groups under 6 students for the best results. This means that all roles will not be used each time, but makes it easier for all students to participate.

5. After the students complete the chosen readings, they should create some type of presentation for their selection. It should include information from each role chosen within the group. The leader will then present it to the full class.

6. Complete step 2 as many times as needed to ensure that students have the ability to practice the skills.