

LITERATURE CIRCLES – Expanding the Walls of the Classroom

(*built upon FAYE BROWNLIE. *GRAND CONVERSATIONS, THOUGHTFUL RESPONSES – A Unique Approach to Literature Circles*)

***Note:** While the framework is based upon the work of Faye Brownlie, this approach takes into account our current “age of networked intelligence”. We suggest that using the power of technology will expand the walls of classroom discussion to include the web world, a world where our students already reside.

GOAL: Through “choice and voice”, engage in meaningful conversations about the novels/readings (eg. as in adult-type book clubs)

At A Glance:

- Students meet in discussion groups 2x/week to talk about the current book they are reading
- Teacher usually joins group; all other students are reading other books at their own rate and responding (depending on what stage you are)
- (Circle time) Students will be at different parts of the book; are encouraged to “tease” other readers to read on but not to ‘spill the beans’
- Keep discussion to 15 min approx.
- 2-3 x/week – respond in journals/blog to the books they are reading. Choice of journal response changes as skills changes.
- Every 2 weeks – all students complete a comprehension activity on the novel
- Culminating Project

Proposed Timetable:

Week 1	-pre-teach 'say something strategy' with other picture books/oral reads > students practice multiple times -Intro book talk -select/group students based on student choices	-hand out books -silent personal read	-intro 'say something' strategy with a picture book or other text -students practice in pairs -provide post-it notes for students-recording as they read	- read; mark/record "say something". -model lit circle process in front of class with 1 group – class reflects on process	- Record journal > name of book, open talk > questions, wonders, I thinks... -teacher pulls lit circle groups to facilitate over the next few sessions
Week 2	- Journal response *first week of Lit Circle rotation (meet with each group 2/wk to set the circle reading behaviour)	-Teacher Lit Circle (usually can get thru 2-3 groups) -Computer Lab > online response on blog/teacher website/wiki	-continue	-Teacher Lit Circle -St Journal response > can be added to blog	-continue
Week 3	Intro comprehension activity	Teacher Lit Circle -Lab>blog response	-cont.	-Teacher Lit circle -continue.	-continue.
Week 4-6	Same as above				

TRACKING STRUCTURES:

- Use a class list to keep track of what books the students read (make them record it).
- Record your conversations with students in groups (class list, post-its in a folder)

CIRCLE EXPECTATIONS to teach:

1. All voices must be included; respectful commenting is explained/modeled
2. EACH student comes with a piece identified to read aloud (must have a specific purpose in mind > funny, well written, poignant, confusing, exciting... (Make sure they have practiced it as an oral reading piece)
3. St reads the passage, explains why it was chosen
4. **Each student** in group **responds** with "say something" strategy – comment must be within the parameters of the piece and the event (not on the quality of oral reading). Teacher takes a turn too.
5. Free discussion at this time (Students at different parts of the book may tease/tantalize the others but not give the book away – no spoiler alerts!)

After start-up things to note:

- Group memberships are fluid
- Make-up of group discussions is rarely the same from one week to another. (some faster readers may find themselves in a new group each week - some may miss their book time so can be invited back [*good thing I like post-it notes which they can keep to remind themselves of their interesting parts]; some will only be in one book for the entire time – these are great too as they build up 'resident expertise' (they are not just the slower readers)
- Your role is to 'model participant' [*I tend to hang onto groups longer than let them go independently too soon – love listening to the sophisticated conversations]
- Say something strategy is nothing more than a means to an end. Goal is for sophisticated conversation about a book/topic
- All voices must be included; respectful commenting is modeled and reflected upon

RESPONSE BLOGGING JOURNALS

Goal: support becoming sophisticated readers

Begin with the 'end in mind' > **Say Something** Strategy > identify significant aspects of text (quotes, events...) and use as launch for personal analytical thinking. These can all flow together and are nothing more than the way that they are presented.

A next strategy is "**So What**" – eg. Give evidence why you think so.

Double-entry Journal (in blogging world):

*Note: this is more in line with a United Journal than an actual double-entry format.

- *What Happened* (Quotes/Events)> use quotation marks, coloured text, format text to separate these from your comments



- *My Thinking* > use normal text to record your reasons, questions, connections to self/world/... [this is where your class comprehension strategies can be incorporated]

*Note: In class (without technology access), these reflections can be recorded in note/scribble form for later writing (this is not the full handwriting to be typed as a good copy onto a blog post, but rather serves as a memory jog for writing later)

*Adaptation:

- Students record an audio of above and insert into their post for commenting. Follow the same structure above.
- Use a non-linguistic representation. Discuss with student and you record in the vocabulary words that the student will build their statements. (*for students who are working on building vocabulary-ESL)

Combination Journal (my favourite):

This allows for a more fluid, integrated response in direct reaction to the text. *However, this does require lots and lots of post-its!!*



- As student reads, record reaction/thoughts on post-its and place on the text as reminders of the parts that they want to respond (usually this is something that they connected with or reacted to in some emotional way).
- Record page number (just in case) and some note to twig their memory about their response. [eg. Pg 5 (drawn arrow to paragraph) – just like in that other book & when I lost my way-scared]
- On blog > re-read post-its to get an idea of what and why of writing and write response. Revise to include details that explain thinking-remember the audience.

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES: (approximately every 2 weeks)

Goal: understand the story structures (character, setting, plot, relationships, theme...). You can do just about anything that supports the intelligences, ways of knowing... The following are only examples of possibilities (which I've done) but not limited to:

- Choose a novel that students have completed, near completed for this.
- They all do the same activity but use different novels [*consider adaptations/modifications]
- Develop the criteria (how product will be assessed)
- Work individually or in small groups [*provide support as needed]

Setting:

- How does the setting affect the plot? [This is the old storyboard platform.]
- Take 11 x 17 (big book size) or 8 x 14 (legal) paper and divide into 6 boxes. (hot dog fold first)
- Imagine you are a photographer with a macro lens (close-up) and a wide angle lens (far-away) who is dropping into the land of the novel.
- Pick 3 parts of the novel plotline – in left column draw the scene; right-hand column write the significance between the setting and the plot of the story (or what's happening in the story). Or do this hotdog style (across top boxes for images/across bottom boxes for writing). I find this easier for flow.

Character Development Chart:

- Describe characteristics of character (courage, creativity,...), find supporting evidence (do, say, what other characters say about them)
- Use a T-chart and record name of character at top
- Choose 3 characters to compare (eg. Intelligent, caring/empathetic, courage...) and record on left-hand side; on right hand side, provide evidence (include page #) to support
- Adapted: can also use an online visual thesaurus to provide additional vocabulary

Venn Diagram:

- Can be used to compare 2 novels and their characters (eg. Use Inspiration/Webspiration or bubbl.us online)

Make a Container representing the character

- (this is a good one for "out of the box" thinking) see page 54 of Faye's book
- This is a very popular one for the culminating activity

Build a Map (this is the learning journey gone wild):

- Create a map of the journey of the character (beyond the plot); [*Adapted – do plotline]
- Describe the key events and how the character learned how to navigate through it, tease out the theme, how he learns how to reach his goal
- This can be very creative by using icons like "road block", "detour", "Mountain!" "out of control". Upper intermediates love the car analogy.
- Big book paper works well; some can include pop ups

Build a Comic (use Comic Life)

- Pick a literary structure and create a comic, using bubbles, text/time boxes.

Culminating Activity/Celebration:

- make a container (see above section)
- group advertisement for novel – videotape it as a commercial
- invite another class in and in groups talk about their book,
- reflection – what has this book taught you about life and living,
- talk show-hot seat (if you have a strong dramatic class),
- create a radio newscast or podcast and interview the characters or plant a newsreel (eg. War of the Worlds radio announcement with interviews on the street, sound effects)
- create talking avatars as teasers about the novels (host these online or convince your teacher-librarian to host it on the school library site). Add an online survey for school to fill out.

FINAL:

- Write a letter to you – reflect on this experience of literature circles and give you advice for next time. Give them an envelope to address to you. (*Note: these are never graded but are a way that students can give the teacher feedback on the process journey.)
- Reflection: have students compare their writing responses from the beginning and the end. What did they notice? Give evidence.