

# Literature Circles

Have you been meaning to start Literature Circles with your classes? Or did you try them this year, but you need to find some ideas to refine the format? Or do you love them, but are always on the look-out for fine tuning ideas? If thinking about Literature Circles is on your summer "To Do" list, here are some resources:

## Essential Resources:

Harvey Daniels, *Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom*.

This 1994 book is the definitive handbook. Now you can download the entire book at no charge in read-only PDF (Adobe Acrobat) format at [www.stenhouse.com/0000.htm](http://www.stenhouse.com/0000.htm)

**NEW** Harvey Daniels, *Looking into Literature Circles*.

This 15-minute video-tape show students (and parents!) in lively literature discussions in three Chicago public school classrooms. A free viewing guide is available at [www.stenhouse.com/0336.htm](http://www.stenhouse.com/0336.htm)

## Websites:

<http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/kschlnoe/LitCircles/index.html>

Literature Circles Resource Center, School of Education, Seattle University

Information for elementary and middle school teachers on organizing and managing literature circles, choosing books, discussion, written response, use with themed literature units, and extension projects.

[www.studyguide.org/lit%20circle%20handout.htm](http://www.studyguide.org/lit%20circle%20handout.htm)

Cindy Adams has a very comprehensive webpage including student hand-outs, parent information letter, extensive list of writing activities to incorporate into literature circles, and a list of storybook (children's books) that work with middle and high school students to use as an introduction to the lit circle process.

## Refinements and adaptations:

### Vary the roles, one example:

*Discussion leader:* Initiates discussion and engages ALL group members on an equal basis. Keeps discussion focused at all times on issues to be discussed and keeps group moving at a reasonable pace through the material to cover. This person is also in charge of identifying themes and selecting passages to illustrate the themes.

*Characterization recorder:* One person lists all characters discussed and summarizes the group's analysis of each one with appropriate quotations and page numbers cited. This person is responsible for making sure the group members are in agreement regarding each character.

*Symbolism recorder:* One person lists all symbols which are used in the novel, copies quotations and explains the meaning of each symbol.

*Landscaper:* One person records the various geographic locations, descriptions of what occurs there and how the characters change with their setting. This job also includes a study of the author's style as he/she describes various settings. ~ Mary Filek, New Jersey, shatzie2@aol.com

### Unanimous role

Have all students assume the illustrator role. Remind them that they are not to "show and tell" their picture, but are to interpret or respond to the illustrations of their group members. ~ Sandy Hayes@aol.com

### Practicing the roles:

**#1 Jigsaw:** For a lit circle discussion on a whole-class novel or story, do a jigsaw discussion. First, group all students of the same role. They share their preparation and why they made the choice they did. Then students form their lit circle group. ~ Sandy Hayes@aol.com

**#2 Fishbowl:** The day before a "fishbowl" for a piece of literature the class has read, one student is chosen to and to prepare thoughtful questions.

The next day, the class puts the desks in two concentric circles. About 5 students are randomly called out by the teacher and take the inner circle seats. The discussion leader for the day also takes an inner circle seat. Folks in the outside circle are "note takers" and "further question" writers. The inner circle discusses literature with the help of the discussion leader.

Now, at this point, fishbowl can work in one of three ways:

1) At the end of 12-15 minutes of discussion by the inner circle, the outer circle can switch places with the inner circle and (with their notes and "further questions" continue discussing the story). Whoever is in the outer circle takes notes and writes questions that they develop. (Gets turned in at end of class). OR

2) After someone in the inner circle makes 3 comments or asks 3 questions, an outer circle person can tap an inner circle person on the shoulder and trade places with them, thus allowing for a quiet flow of folks in and out of the circle. OR

3) After 12-15 minutes of discussion, the outer circle is "allowed" to ask their questions of the inner circle and to comment one at a time on the inner circle discussion.

While this goes on, I sit at the side of the room and keep a rudimentary count of who participated and who didn't.

Usually everyone who has read jumps in to participate at some point.

~ Cindy Adams, Alabama, cellen2@aol.com, [www.studyguide.org](http://www.studyguide.org)