

Literature Circles in Middle School: One Teacher's Journey

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Literature circles are present in many classrooms in a variety of formats for diverse purposes. The authors of *Literature Circles in Middle School: One Teacher's Journey* collaborated on this book to present one teacher's story on her successful use of literature circles in her language arts curriculum. Her literary "journey" began by explaining why she used literature circles. This information includes a definition of literature circles, ways in which literature circles meet the needs of her students, the role of literature circles in her curriculum, how she solves the grading challenges, and why literature circles are successful in her classroom.

Subsequent chapters are organized in a methodical manner from how to get started with literature circles to evaluating student progress. Chapters 2 and 3 describe steps to take to organize literature circles and choose books for the activities. Chapters 4 and 5 give detailed descriptions of ways to incorporate effective discussion and written activities throughout the project. Included are samples of activities and rubrics for evaluation. Ideas for focus lessons, which emphasize skills to be taught, are interspersed throughout the chapters. The final chapter, *Extending Response through the Arts*, offers a number of suggestions and samples of

culminating projects that will highlight significant parts of the story, as well as lessons learned during the literature circle project..

The authors included several aides for teachers. The CD-ROM, provided with the book, features an extensive list of books that are potential literature circle choices. Author, genre, period, theme, and readability levels are a few of the fields that can be used to sort the hundreds of book choices. The first appendix contains tables that align the focus lessons with Washington State Essential Academic Learning Requirements. Though these standards are specific to Washington, it is a valuable resource for teachers to use when aligning the lessons with their own states' standards. The second appendix contains a list of books and authors divided by theme.

I used this book to introduce literature circles to teacher candidates in my Language Arts methods course. The teacher candidates learned about literature circles while participating in them. I provided sets of books for each group, which was formed by the candidates' choice of book. Each week we have focus lessons (which actually focus on literature circles), and then they move into groups to practice what was learned. I found the book to be very helpful for me, as an instructor, and for the teacher candidates. The resources provided in the chapters, appendices, and CD-ROM proved invaluable. Teachers interested in beginning, or even refining, literature circles in their classes would benefit from this book.

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CD-ROM included

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