Effective Conversations Around Tough Text Within Middle School Literature Circles

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HOW CAN I ENSURE THAT EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS AROUND TOUGH TEXT ARE TAKING PLACE WITHIN MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERATURE CIRCLES?

by

Gretchen E. Enselein

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Literacy Education.

Hamline University
Saint Paul, Minnesota
August 2015

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CHAPTER ONE

“One good conversation can shift the direction of change forever.”
-Linda Lambert

Introduction

I am always amazed that the smell of burning wood brings a sense of relief and happiness to me. The instant the aroma fills my body, I transport back to the 1980s, and I am once again a young girl sitting next to a crackling fire in the fireplace. I imagine the crackling sound of the wood burning as the heat from the fire warms my face. I picture myself seated on the floor with my holey, blush colored blanket across my lap, surrounded by worn copies of the series Little Critter and The Bernstein Bears. I imagine that I am once again flipping through the pages, sounding out the words and looking at the pictures as I create my own story of what the illustrations show. I find peace and happiness as I read through the books.

The two series Little Critter, and The Bernstein Bears helped me overcome my anxiety and fears while growing up. As I read the stories with my family as I grew up, I learned how to be a positive role model and how love my two younger brothers. Through the stories I studied what to expect when going to the dentist for the first time, or how to overcome my fear of the dark. The stories brought a sense of comfort as I knew at an early age that no matter what fear or challenge I would have in my life, there was always a story and a character that could relate to my feelings. This was the beginning of my journey, a journey of love for reading, talking, and teaching others.
If I could choose one quality to describe myself as a middle school student, I would choose the word *loquacious*. I consistently wanted time to talk with my friends. It didn’t matter where I was, the hallway, classroom, lunchroom, gym, bus, locker room, or sporting event. Having the opportunity to communicate with my friends and peers allowed me to find confidence in my own thoughts and beliefs. I wasn’t afraid to voice my opinion, even if it did cause minor conflict between friends or teachers. Communication played a large role in defining who I was as a person, as well as determining who I wanted to be as I continued to mature and grow academically. My goal as a teacher is to ensure rich conversations between my students and myself. It is a priority in my teaching that students engage in authentic conversations between one another to help define themselves as learners as well as future leaders, similar to how I did as a twelve year old.

As I now reflect on my middle school students, I immediately brainstorm words such as: *communicative, sensitive, inquisitive* and *strong minded*. My students remind me a lot of myself. I was constantly searching for answers to questions that popped into my head, but the teacher didn’t discuss or answer those questions; many times my questions were turned down by the teacher to be answered at a later time, after class. I’ve discovered through building a close community in my classroom that the conversations between students range from simple “Hey, how’s it going?” to “Can you believe the character did that?!! What were they thinking?” I’ve discovered the more I expose students to a variety of text, the more they want to talk with one another. The language I use with my students influences, among other things, who they think they are, what they
think they're doing, the relationships they have with others, the strategic information available to them in the classroom, and the possibilities available to them for thinking about literacy and their own lives. As students converse with one another, they pique one another’s interests. Students wonder why, get themselves thinking, as well as motivate themselves, and their peers to make connections with the content. This magnifies student participation.

As students participate, they prove the extent of their understanding, and peers help to correct ideas when other students don’t see content or ideas clearly. As student participation increases, my participation in leading the discussion decreases. A question can be asked and students are invited to discuss possible answers with each other. It’s important for my students to speak up in our classroom discussions in order to offer information to others, ask and answer questions, as well as argue different solutions. Their skills continue to develop as students practice, and develop more in-depth through feedback given by peers with vocabulary that may be different than the teachers. Language is not merely a tool for describing what one already knows, it is a process through which we learn about our world and develop creative and problem solving skills.

Human intelligence is developed through speaking and listening. According to Fisher, (2007): “The quality of our lives depends on the quality of our thinking and on our ability to communicate and discuss what we think with others. Talk is intrinsic to literacy and to our ability to form relationships with others. It is the foundation of both
verbal and emotional intelligence” (p. 1). As students talk with one another in class, they are capable of hearing another person’s voice, as well as additional points of views or opinions.

As a reading teacher, I strive to include conversation between one another and allow students to read a variety of text. One way for my students to read a variety of texts in a short amount of time and talk about what they are reading is through implementation of literature circles (Daniels, 2004, 2006, 2009). Students build a connection with their peers on an academic level by first making connections to the characters in the story, then with one another, which eventually, through authentic conversations molds into friendship outside the classroom. It is essential that I continue to learn about and research best practices with regards to embedding talk and conversation into my reading classroom.

The goal of my capstone is to not only allow for communication and discussion to occur in my classroom between students, but to truly focus that communication and discussion on critical, authentic and meaningful reflection on multi-text sources. The question I will be exploring in my capstone is: How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles? In this first chapter, I share how talking about books has influenced my personal journey as a reader and my professional journey as a teacher. It’s critical that I inspire and increase the quality of my students’ lives depending on the quality of their thinking and communication with others.
**Personal Experiences Talking About Books**

One of my most cherished memories is sitting on my Great Grandma’s lap, sucking on sugar cubes and being read to. I remember being snuggled up in a big fluffy blanket, sitting on my Great Grandma’s lap as she rubbed my hair and read the book *Winnie-the-Pooh and the Pebble Hunt* – the story of how simple problems call for simple solutions. Through the discussions with my Great Grandma, the story taught me the importance of friendship, determination, and slowing down when issues arise in life.

Throughout elementary school, I continued to enjoy reading stories that many of my peers did. I would attend weekly readings at the local library where a mini-book club was formed. Children circled around the librarian’s feet as we were read to: *Little Critters, The Bernstein Bears, If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* and *Where the Wild Things Are*. I felt transported as the librarian used her voice to make the story come alive. Later in elementary school, I learned that I could transport into the book while reading by myself. I continued to read the stories I grew up listening to and expanded my horizon to read what my friends were reading: *The Boxcar Children, Judy Moody*, and *American Girl* stories.

I remember frequently waking up from nightmares after reading *Goosebumps*, as the terrifying stories came to life in my dreams. My mom continued to urge me to try something else; however, I didn’t want to be different than my friends. I had to read what they were reading so that we would have something to talk about. My friends and I read, directed, and performed an American Girl play for our families. The thought of reading the play together and using our imagination to make the characters really come
alive excited all of us. I was able to re-live the moments of being lost in a story as I
turned into one of the characters. I was disappointed when other girls didn’t practice
their lines as much as I did and didn’t put their heart into the play. I had to ask myself,
how could I continue to read the same stories as they did, when they didn’t take it
seriously?

During middle school, I continued to enjoy reading with my mom. The reason for
this was, unlike many of my peers, I enjoyed exploring stories that I couldn’t relate my
own life to. I found an escape from my daily life. When I read stories, they brought
many emotions to the surface that I’d never experienced before, I learned that the more I
read, the more I connected to my classmates. It was important to discuss the stories I was
reading with my mom, who helped explain the challenging concepts of child abuse, rape,
kidnapping, divorce and slavery. As a teacher, I would later tap into how she used to
guide me in order to help support students and guide them in their own journey to find a
personal love of literacy.

However, during high school and college I lost the passion and excitement for
reading that I once had. As my brain become over loaded with coursework and
extracurricular activities, I felt bored in my life and I wasn’t sure why. I felt lost. I
struggled to feel acceptance from my peers, and I struggled to connect with the world
around me. I didn’t realize until reflecting later, that it was due to not engaging with
literature that I had once loved so much.

It wasn’t until my student teaching experience that I identified the missing
piece. I hadn’t read a story that I enjoyed in years! After leading literature circles and
reading *Walk Two Moons* and *Hatchet* I re-learned to love literacy. I began to love literacy as a whole. Literacy wasn’t just about reading a book, falling in love with the characters, and wishing the book would never end. Literacy included writing, thinking, discussing, and providing evidence that the book truly meant something to me and could mean something to someone else. After working with my cooperating teacher and determining how to use writing, thinking, and communicating skills, students began to find a passion in reading. The students built passion for reading through writing and communicating with their fellow classmates.

My passion and excitement for teaching reading thus began anew during my student teaching experience. I taught Language Arts in gender-based classes of 5th and 6th grade students. I quickly learned the importance of student engagement with text. My passion continued to grow as I gained employment as a full-time 6th grade teacher. I was honored after my first year of teaching to be involved with developing and writing curriculum for an intervention course based on the Reader’s Workshop model (Atwell, 2000, 2009). I felt confident in what I had taught for the last three years. The love of literacy was being passed like the Olympic torch, from one believer to the next.

**Professional Experiences Talking About Books**

Throughout the Reader’s Workshop curriculum, I embedded teacher-led book talks into my curriculum as I recommended many book titles to struggling readers. Through the recommendations that I’ve made I’ve noticed an increased love of reading for my students. I also used teacher-led book talks while introducing text to students as we focused on our strategy use throughout the course.
The entire time while teaching I continued to ask myself “how can I have my students talk more about the books with one another?” I’ve implemented book passes where students preview texts, rate the books and reflect on why they do or do not want to read a book. Students then talk with their peers to rationalize their responses. Students also complete book reviews when they complete a book that includes a brief summary, their opinion on the book and who they would recommend the book to. Many times my students talk during the last few minutes of class and during passing time about the books they are reading to their peers. I wanted to find a way for students to have authentic and meaningful conversations about text with their peers yet I felt the pressure to stay on pace with the curriculum. Talking about books always fell into the “extra” time at the end of class and I knew that something needed to change in how I was teaching.

It was in January of 2014 that I was given a blessing in disguise. I was given one week’s notice that I would be teaching a brand new course for 7th and 8th grade students who had “graduated” out of intervention courses. Quite honestly, I freaked out. I had never taught 7th or 8th grade, I didn’t have curriculum or resources for the new course, and I had one weekend to determine what I was going to teach. I had to make decisions quickly. Based on the knowledge acquired in my Master of Arts in Literacy Education program at Hamline, I knew that I had to create a course where students felt a sense of community, connection and engagement with text. Due to the absence of student-led talk about books in my classroom, I knew exactly how to cure my anxiety and nervousness: literature circles. It made complete sense. Middle school students love to chatter with one another, and with the assumption that students “graduated” out of
intervention courses, reading the novels with support and modeling would be a breeze. However, I felt that there was an important piece to the puzzle missing - talk. How could I ensure that effective conversations took place within the literature circles?

At the start of the new course, students were apprehensive about literature circles. We started with reading a whole class novel *Wonder* by R. J. Palacio, which was used to explicitly model literature circle roles and expectations. Students were nervous to share their connections, questions and ideas about the text. The idea of talking about text was a new experience and made students feel uncomfortable. Not only were students with new peers, they were in a new environment and were also with a new teacher. I persisted that the value in using literature circles would not only bring my students together in a positive learning community but would stretch my students’ thinking.

It was a large struggle to encourage authentic and meaningful talk within the student-led literature circles. The students became agitated on days when literature circles met and they were expected to discuss the books. Even though I had high expectations of what literature circle discussions would look like and sound like, I still found the room to be quiet and students re-reading the assigned pages. I needed to learn more about conversation and discussion in a middle school classroom. It would be essential for me to lead conversations and discussions that would scaffold meaningful conversation between students as they discussed literature.

Eventually, literature circles transformed into a valuable teaching tool for my students as personal connections were made to the text. Students identified sentences from the text and made either text to self, text to media, or text to world
connections. Student connections allowed for a continued sense of community as the
students learned from their peers. While students made connections to the text, together
we worked with how to write questions that would create a meaningful discussion with
their peers.

We continued to read the text, *Wonder*, and students became more and more
willing to share with their peers. We worked together to help students to write discussion
questions that included higher level questioning surrounding the main character,
Auggie. A few examples include: “how would you feel if you were Auggie?” “Contrast
your experience with bullying to Auggie’s.” “If you could change two things about the
story, what would they be and why?” When students began to write more questions, I
observed that the conversations in the classroom transformed from what students did the
night before to discussing predictions and connections about the text.

After we finished the text, *Wonder*, students were allowed choice in their next
literature circle book. Students were allowed to pick from the following titles:

* Absolutely, *Positively Not* by David LaRochelle
* *Copper Sun* by Sharon M. Draper
* *Deadline* by Chris Crutcher
* *Homeboyz* by Alan Lawrence Sitomer
* *Period 8* by Chris Crutcher
* *Something Like Hope* by Shawn Goodman
* *The Knife of Never Letting Go* by Patrick Ness
The book choices were identified for literature circles from student interest, and research conducted during another grad school course (LANG 7903, Advancing Secondary Readers, 7-12) through Hamline University.

After reading the next round of literature circle books, students voiced their opinions on which books they enjoyed reading and which books they didn’t. Students provided evidence as to why they did or didn’t like a text. I felt a sense of accomplishment that students were enjoying the texts, but I also felt that I wasn’t meeting all of my students’ needs. I had ignited conversation and excitement for books. However, I knew that my students were missing an essential piece of reflection that would promote their love of lifelong reading.

I was overwhelmed with the desire to provide opportunities for my students to participate in the literature circles. I knew that students were missing the true point of the literature circles - the discussion. I knew that I needed to learn how to best support discussions with my students. My classes couldn’t be completely teacher-led. My class periods lacked the meaningful conversations between students. There was a fire burning in me to study how conversations unfold in a middle school classroom.

After feeling frustration with the lack of authentic discussions between my students, I began to talk with content area teachers to determine what I was missing in my classroom. I craved to know if the content area teachers found success with discussions based off of text in their classrooms. I hoped that one of the teachers would tell me the magic answer of essential discussion elements they used in their classroom to increase authentic conversation.
Through many conversations with my co-workers, it was apparent that students were struggling in many of their content area classes. Students rarely had the opportunity to talk about text and when they did, it resorted to silence. I began to think that if all courses at my school effectively took on a role of literacy, reading and writing, our students would increase engagement and have exposure to conversation that would inspire them to continue to have discussions with their peers.

It was a priority for me to learn how to increase student voice in my classroom and how to meet all of my students’ needs with the use of literature circles in my classroom. My passion for discussions stems from my need to be social, as well as the knowledge of my students’ need to be social and interact with one another. Through the use of literature circles, I discovered and understood the importance of effective conversations that take place within a middle school literature circle.

Next Steps

In order to answer the question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?*, I designed a curriculum to make possible the implementation of literature circles across content areas in middle school classrooms. As I continue to feel confidence and success with the curriculum I’ve created, I’ve identified the true focus of the literature circles are how students actively engage in what they love most, communication with their peers. I continue to learn through each discussion I sit through, as students identify confusion or “a-ha” moments that I missed when I read the story.
Within this capstone project, the focus is on what conversations can look and sound like during a middle school literature circle. This includes how students focus their thinking and use higher-level questioning, participate in authentic and meaningful conversations with one another, challenge their thoughts and celebrate their success of truly understanding a text. I also focus on how I, as their teacher, can support them in their discussions and encourage higher level thinking.

My capstone defines how literature circles help students meet their academic and personal and social needs, the power of literature circles, as well as the power of effective conversations in a middle school classroom. Through the authentic, meaningful conversations that my students have, their deep understanding and connection of a variety of texts encourage them to be lifelong readers, participating in book clubs or literature circles as they grow into adults.

**Summary**

While growing up there were many times of struggle, change, and success where I looked for guidance and support. Whether it was reading *Winnie-the-Pooh and the Pebble Hunt* while sucking on sugar cubes with my great-grandma, or snuggling up on the couch reading challenging text with my mom, I was blessed to have the opportunity to read many books that offered advice and guidance. Literature was a way for me to read and escape my daily life. While I read and discussed the lives of characters in books, I learned how to respond to challenging situations based off of the character’s choices in the books I read. Little did I know that the support I received while growing up would guide me in helping my students on their personal journey to find a love of
literacy. To continue to support my students’ journey across their schooling I’ve created a curriculum that incorporates literature circles across content areas.

Chapter two explores the research that has been completed on literature circles. The literature review defines appropriate text to use to scaffold and inspire conversations for middle school students through the use of tough texts. I seek to answer my capstone question, *how can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?*

Chapter three defines the school setting where the curriculum is implemented. The chapter reviews the methods that are used while developing the guide for staff based off of research-based strategies referenced in chapter two. Chapter four is the curriculum that teachers use. The guide includes definitions for the best practice strategies, lesson plans, graphic organizers, text and rubrics to assess student work. Chapter five highlights what was learned through the research as well as reflection from the design of the curriculum guide. The curriculum design and reflection reviews the learning of my capstone question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?*
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In chapter one, I discussed how my interest in literature circles, and conversations between middle school students began. My experiences in a higher level reading class, sparked my interest in critically reading text and having effective conversations between middle school students. I witnessed students struggling to have authentic and meaningful conversations about the text that they read. Therefore, I witnessed students’ urge to talk about major events in the book, without the tools and skills to have the conversations.

I believe the teaching and application of effective conversations through literature circles will truly prepare students not only for the rigors of school but, more importantly, for the challenges they will face in their lives. I consider the ability to read and talk about text a responsibility that teachers must scaffold and teach. I want my students to view situations in a text with a critical eye (and ear), and I want them to understand and respect the conversations and connections their peers make to the text. I hope my students begin to understand the power and privilege that comes with holding effective conversations, with the and that students rise to meet my expectation that they will use their skills to positively impact the world around them.

This chapter explores the literature and research that has helped me to answer the question, how can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles? Throughout the literature review, I focus
on three main areas; the history of literature circles, how to construct groups to promote conversations and defining the term “tough text” (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011.)

I begin by describing literature circles, including the history and strengths of literature circles in a middle school classroom. I present the rationale for literature circles given the current research on best practice in education. Next, I explain the evolving of roles between student and teacher through the use of literature circles. Finally, I explore how tough texts can be applied to content area classrooms to support student interest, and build a classroom community as students become critical readers.

In the second major section, I explicitly define how to construct groups to promote conversations. Then, I define how scaffolding is used to promote effective conversations at a middle school level. I review the importance of questioning as well as the power of student generated questions. Finally, I review research based strategies that can be implemented in classrooms to support literature circle assessment.

The third major section defines the term “tough-text.” The research by Cindy O’Donnell-Allen (2011), discusses how tough text promotes critical readers in a classroom. Included is a research based overview regarding how tough texts help students learn, reflect and discuss effectively in their community. The section also reviews important elements of discussions that promote critical readers through making connections with what they’ve read and reflected upon.

**Literature Circles in the Middle School Classroom**

Prior to diving into using literature circles in a middle school classroom, it is key to discuss and review the major idea of literature circles based on Harvey Daniels’
research (2000, 2006, and 2009.) From there, I review research on the evolving roles that students assume while completing literature circles. Next, my research provides details on how teachers and students are shifting roles as literature circles are used in middle school reading and content area classrooms. Finally, I will discuss the benefits of literature circles.

Understanding and defining literature circles, According to Harvey Daniels (2006), in the 1980s, many teachers simultaneously invented the idea of literature circles. The new practice and idea of literature circles brought the established idea of adult reading groups into schools. As literature circles are implemented in classrooms, they are one of the most consistently reliable practices where readers explore texts they’ve chosen in the challenging but supportive company of others (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011).

Before presenting an in-depth description of literature circles and effective conversations, it is necessary to clarify the definition of literature circle. Based on my interpretations of current research on this term, I have adopted a definition for bringing clarity to my research. According to Daniels & Stineke (2004) and Daniels (2006, 2009), literature circles are small, peer-led groups of students engaging in conversations around the same text. Text selection may be a range of materials, from poems, to articles or novels. Students are allowed to choose a text they would like to explore and gather with peers based on the text selection. Literature circle members plan a way to share highlights of their reading with the classroom community (Gallagher, 2009). Harvey Daniels (1994) believes that literature circles provide opportunities for readers to share multiple interpretations of a text and encourages individuals to make meaning from literature.
As students learn to share with their community of peers about their personal connections to the text, students will continue to find a passion for sharing and discussing among their friends about the text they’re reading. Teachers cannot provide robust, engaged, and differentiated learning unless kids can break into a variety of groups and work together. For teachers to truly sponsor active learning, there must be many people talking and doing at once—not just the teacher. We simply must train kids to team, give them plenty of structured practice, and then trust them to work as partners (Harvey, Daniels, 2009).

Literature circles allow students to choose the books they read and how they interpret them. Students pick their own books for reading and they experience success and not frustration as compared to whole class novels, which may be too easy, too hard or too boring for students. At times, whole class novels are not differentiated or students’ needs. Through literature circles, students have the opportunity of reading a text that is readable and interesting to the student at that moment in their life. Along with choice of book, students have choice as to the amount that they will read, they choose the role they will play within the group, and opt for different paths of discussion and culminating activities (Wilfong, 2004). Students identify positive and negative choices that they may have made within their literature circle (book, role and discussion topics.) Students quickly learn to take responsibility for their actions. There is curricular flexibility for teaching sound response strategies, and students, like readers outside of school, enjoy the social aspect of book clubs.
The varied grouping of students allows for authentic discussion to be created between students. Nystrand, Gamoran, and Hecky (1993) believe that small groups in which students define and resolve problems are more effective than “collaborative seatwork” which entails highly structured instructional time and completion of worksheets. Students who participate in literature circles do more than just receive information about a text; they are also placed in the role of expert or resource for their peers. Students not only develop their own thoughts, but they must remember it’s just as important to remember someone else’s thoughts too (Daniels, 2009). Literature circles not only keep students engaged, but also support authentic and meaningful discussions as well as camaraderie as the classroom’s community is developed. In this case, students are not grouped by ability level (Batchelor, 2012).

The roles students assume in literature circles. Students do not know how to automatically discuss with their peers. They have to learn how to talk and share. It is a skill, just like reading and writing, with its own set of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS are the K-12 standards designed to prepare all students for success in college, career, and life by the time they graduate from high school (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015). Standards for grades 6-12 include benchmarks on speaking and listening to help ensure that students gain adequate mastery of a range of skills and applications. Included in the Common Core are standards that require students to “engage effectively” in discussions with peers, understand and evaluate the ideas voiced by others, pose questions, and evaluate evidence introduced by their peers. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2015.) The standards that are identified to help students
master the skills of speaking and listening in the classroom, prepares students for their future lives.

Students may understand the task and be motivated to complete it, but they often have trouble sharing their thinking in groups. To help students generate meaningful discussion, specific roles are assigned to students in groups. Blum (2002) states that literature circles were initially taught through modeling, and practicing role and assigned tasks by reading and discussing short stories. When new activities are introduced, worksheets for literature circles roles may be appropriate at times for students to practice the new skills. Roles encompass the skills (questioning, summarizing, clarifying, predicting) that strong readers utilize. The literature circle specific roles makes these skills visible to the students (Gallagher, 2004).

Assigning specific roles may help students who come to us unable or unwilling to participate in meaningful group discussions. The literature circle roles below (Figure 1) are borrowed from Harvey (2004), Educational Research Service (1995) and Hey and Hanson (1999) are adapted to a middle school English Language Arts literature circle, but could be adapted and modified for any content area or grade.

However, teachers need to be aware of how rigidly they adhere to the literature circle roles to help deviate from the scripted discussions (Gallagher, 2004 and Daniels, 2009) because assigning specific roles may limit student thoughts and may lend artificiality to students’ discussions (Daniels, 2009). The purpose of roles is to provide students with models of what good readers do when they sit down to discuss text. At
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Responsible for designing, introducing and discussing questions about the text. This role is also essential to encourage contributions from other members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Luminary</td>
<td>Responsible for taking readers back to memorable, important sections of the text and reads them aloud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connector</td>
<td>Responsible for taking group members from the text’s world out to the real world, where readers’ experience connects with literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illustrator</td>
<td>Responsible for contributing a graphic, non-linguistic response to the text. Illustration shares an important part of the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene Setter</td>
<td>Responsible for tracking scene changes, characters, actions or events in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Captain</td>
<td>Responsible for responding to the actions of the characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Wizard</td>
<td>Responsible for defining and discussing interesting or confusing words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizer</td>
<td>Responsible for preparing a brief summary, which conveys the points, main highlights of the text.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1:* Literature circle roles explained (Harvey, 2004 & Wilson, 1995)

Times, teachers may use role sheets (Daniels, 2009) to help support students with the written work of the roles. The role sheets may be graphic organizers to help teachers explicitly model the thinking that occurs with specific roles. Role sheets can also be used for students to label and identify their thinking with specific roles. When teachers provide models of how literature circles are run and what authentic discussion is like, this should be seen as training wheels for guiding talk for novice readers. Once students begin to understand what strong readers talk about, these training wheels (roles and role sheets) should be gradually withdrawn (Gallagher, 2004).
With time all things change, and in 2006, Harvey Daniels retracted his previous statements on the use of literature circle roles. According to Daniels (2006), teachers should now rarely use role sheets, but instead have kids capture their responses in reading response logs, on sticky notes on homemade bookmarks (great for non-fiction) or in written conversation. Additional examples of student work that captures student’s responses could include: drawing images or symbols, jotting down book titles, poems, songs, or movies that spark a connections while reading, noting vocabulary words they weren’t sure about, or writing questions they had while reading or listing predictions via bulleted words. Some teachers avoid summary responses (Harvey, 2006) although summaries are important; teachers would rather see students reflect on what they read and comment on the thinking about their reading. The essential components of all literature circle discussions are that students observe, listen, participate and practice.

The shifting roles of teachers and students. As noted above, at the start of the year, when setting up literature circles for the first time, teachers can assign specific roles to help drive student discussion (Harvey, Daniels, 2009). As students assume more responsibility within the literature circle reading and discussions, teachers need to adjust their role in the classroom.

Rather than being the expert on the subject matter, we have to become the context setter for the discussion. Rather than being a dispenser of grades, teachers have to become developmental mentors. Rather than being presenters of content, teachers have to become facilitators of learning (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011). Our main goal is to set the stage for learning. Through the structure of small reading discussion groups, we give
children a safe and supportive forum for exploring questions talk and sharing of responses, together with opportunity to ask questions, we lay the basis for children to deepen their awareness, appreciation, and critical insights into texts (Daniels, 2009).

As teachers take a step back and observe their students in literature circles, they will hear authentic conversation and passion about literature flow between students. At this point, it’s vital that teachers keep quiet, let the other children answer, and concentrate on what was behind any question. Teachers must reverse traditional roles, and, instead of the students trying to guess what was in the teacher’s head, we must put ourselves in the position of trying to guess what was in the students’ heads (Gallagher, 2004). The more teachers stay out of the conversations, the more students will become less dependent on our models and frames for talk.

In their work on literature circles, both O’Donnell-Allen (2011) and Gallagher (2004) state that, as teachers listen to discussions, they should be alert to possibilities in the discussions to model critical questions, highlight features of the text we believe significant, and explore alternative meanings. Teachers can quickly assess and highlight group member’s actions and contributions by observing and sitting in on discussion. If conflict occurs during discussion time, a teacher can invite suggestions on how to handle the situation in the future. However, through modeling discussion protocol, it promotes collaboration as a positive way to learn, instead of there being consistent bickering or fighting between students. However, remembering to consciously restrain ourselves from pounding on every opportunity to talk, correct, or discuss our thoughts. Harvey and Daniels (2009) state that teachers must remember to respect the student’s agendas and not
to compromise their enjoyment of the books. With the literature circle model in use in a classroom, the teacher is not the facilitator of the room anymore. Teachers must teach and assign expectations for literature circles.

As students participate in a literature circle, they develop a true sense of what it takes to function within a “team.” They learn about accountability to others (Harvey and Daniels, 2006.) They accept responsibility to help each other learn. Students begin to learn that their performance depends on others and is affected by others. Students continue to integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally within their literature circles. This also includes their own reflections and response to a text.

Self-assessment should be allowed at the end of each discussion for students to assess their contribution. Reflection is an essential component of evaluation and students must process their progress to meet personal goals as well as working with groups. (Johnson, Johnson & Roseth, 2010.) After a conversation is complete, a teacher may ask each group member to discuss or identify an interesting moment from their discussion. Teachers should assess the discussion the first few times groups meet (Gallagher, 2009). This is a time for teachers to jot down notes or observations as well as incorporate interventions as needed. As Batchelor (2012) states, this could include a variety of categories, such as sharing ideas and encouraging others, and including examples. Students could also include what they thought they did well and where they may improve. Asking for specific examples of student evaluation increases authentic response and reflection instead of an “everything’s fine” response. A final response to a
text at the end of a literature circle rotation promotes a discovery of reading as being pleasurable as well social. This allows for new connections to authors, titles, and friendships.

Proper assistance within an environment that fosters learning, supports effective group talk, and provides a structure that helps shape conversations, allows students to internalize the strategies and language used in rich, meaningful discussions. The structures help students through their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), the zones of proximal development refer to the differences between what a learner can do without help and what he or she can do with help. In time, they internalize these collaborative strategies, and thoughtful discussions become part of the students’ zones of development. By the end of the year students are able to carry on a meaningful discussion without imposed structures in place (Gallagher, 2004). Students will be able to successfully complete the task alone and without help and to apply this knowledge to new situations they may encounter.

Middle school tends to be a difficult time for students as they become painfully aware of the outside pressures of academics including honors and gifted courses as well as intervention courses (Layne, 2009). Collaboration occurs throughout the literature circles and students assist one another to gain a sense of belonging. Students find their voices as literature circles provide a safe place to express concerns and show intelligence. Students come together and discuss and expand upon their knowledge. Students quickly begin to look to their peers as a resource rather than competing against their peers (Wilfong, 2006). In some other classrooms, students may
be more reliant on the teacher for all of the answers—what to write about, what to read, and how to answer a question, because students don’t have faith in their own learning. When teachers allow for the opportunity for students to have the control of choice, teachers watch students grow in confidence of their own learning.

**Literature circles and classroom community.** Literature circles promote classroom community because any classroom practice that focuses on effective group work and talk fosters teamwork and creates a work culture that values collaboration. In a teamwork environment, people understand and believe that thinking, planning, decisions, and actions are better when done cooperatively. People recognize, and even assimilate, the belief that none of us is as good as all of us (Gallagher, 2004). According to Lori Wilfong (2004), while working collaboratively, students reap the benefits of true motivation, higher level learning, an increased self-esteem, and increased positive pressure to succeed academically with peers. Evidence of well-structured literature circles provide support a positive attitude toward reading for students of many ages, and for those with disabilities as well as typical students, when the right accommodations are offered (Daniels, 2006).

Students who participate in literature circles do more than just receive information about a text; they are also viewed as a resource for their peers. Even though some discussions may focus on irrelevant and trivial features, if we allow the time and space for these questions and let such topics take their own course, these basic discussions will lead to other issues, discussing emotions, feelings, consideration of strengths and
weaknesses in society (Simpson, 1997). Students not only develop their own thoughts, but they must remember it’s just as important to remember someone else’s thoughts too.

Literature circles also contribute to students’ emotional and social development (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011.) Literature circles helps students read with empathy, and novels remind students of “life’s contingencies; in so doing, take matters of choice and commitment more seriously than they might otherwise have done” (Cole, 1989, p. 90). Ellin Oliver Keene (2008) identifies empathy as one of the key outcomes of deep understanding. Many of my students want to discuss the contingencies they face in their daily lives with peers. Through the use of literature circles, students are also able to extend themselves into situations they have never experienced. Literature circles provide the opportunity to experience the emotions of other people. Students learn to feel for people very different from themselves, and begin to understand such people in ways they may never have thought possible. We are therefore not limited to our reading based only on our own experiences and perspectives (Oatley, 2005). Our aim with literature circles is to get students to construct and to challenge texts, to see how texts provide selective versions of the world, with an eye towards transforming social, economic, and cultural conditions. The texts provide a means for understanding one’s own history and culture and their connection to current social structure as well as fostering an activism toward equal participation for all the decisions that affect and control our lives (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011).

Most of all, teachers and students appreciate the potential for students helping their peers become more independent and able readers of complex literature. (O’Donnell-
Allen, 2011). In peer led groups, there is less risk of being “wrong” than in a whole-class discussion. Through engaging with their peers, students allow for positive peer pressure to shine, as the literature circles are run successfully and cooperatively by the students, not the teachers. As students’ engagement increases, so does their ownership of the literature circle and soon enough, students will assume the responsibility of their literature circles. According to Donalyn Miller (2009), this leads to students having more fun with their reading.

As students read literature together, they feel the pain and anguish, defeat, joy and victory of the characters. Harvey and Daniels (2009) express through the authentic discussions students are able to have with their peers, due to a sense of belonging in the classroom, students can refine their emotional understanding of a text. Students feel with other people who in ordinary life, might seem too foreign-or too threatening-to understand their emotions. Perhaps, then, when students return to their real lives, they can better understand why people act the way they do, and react with caution, even compassion toward them.

**Literature circles in content area classrooms.** There is sometimes a misconception that literacy teachers are the only teachers that explicitly teach all of the thinking strategies, collaborative processes, and inquiry steps before kids have a chance to answer questions. Gallagher (2009), Harvey and Daniels (2009), O’Donnell-Allen (2011) and Layne (2009), support the idea that content area teachers explicitly teach the skills above as well. However, instead of using a fiction text, they may use content area text including textbooks or other nonfiction text sources to support students. Students wouldn’t last long
if teachers taught countless lessons before setting them free to satisfy their curiosity and search for answers (Harvey, Daniels, 2009). In content area classes, students are asked to participate in collaborative groups, ask and answer questions about a topic, gather information and deepen understanding. Teachers model a few important ideas of how to think and work together and then send students off to investigate. Teachers then continue to teach more about comprehension and collaboration throughout the inquiry process.

Some content area teachers feel that students are disengaged with the content area text, but literature circles provide an experience for authentic conversation about literature, and students are more engaged in their reading (Encisco, 1996). When we focus on reading, listening, viewing, communicating, collaborating, and researching, learners come away with a lot of strategy knowledge, but also a ton of content. Learning, understanding, and remembering subject matter is a direct product of knowing how to think, work together, and wonder (Gallagher, 2009).

Teachers have an immediate incentive to try nonfiction literature circles because standardized reading tests contain 70-80% expository text. (Daniels, 2002). Literature circles in content area courses are an opportunity for students to be exposed to and engage with expository text. What do these small group inquiries look like? Instead of choosing a single book to read, kids select a topic or a question to explore. When comprehension, collaboration, and research intersect, inquiry circles take root and grow our kids’ learning and understanding (Gallagher, 2009). Literature/inquiry circles are a key aspect to allow students to appreciate literature. Literature circles can be used across content areas as they are “small, peer-led reading discussion groups” (Harvey, Daniels,
2009), which will allow for comprehension, collaboration, and research to occur. Since there isn’t a simple template for readers or teachers to use, the importance of using literature circles across content areas is for students to have exposure and to appreciate different forms of literature.

Daniels (2002) suggests that teachers should change what students read. Students are exposed to too little genuine text in school. Literature circles allow for great discussion with text as students are exposed to “real life” text. Daniels states, “if nonfiction circles are going to be as successful as literature circles, kids need texts that are “discussable.” (Educational Research Service, 1995, p.11). Daniels (2002) and Devick-Fry (2010) discuss how expository text discussions can help students remember information, collaborate, and learn from their peers.

To ensure that content area inquiry/literature circles are supported by staff, administration, students, and parents, the following are Principles of Inquiry Circles that support the use in classrooms according to Harvey and Daniels (2009):

- Choice of topics based on genuine student curiosity questions, interests
- Digging deeply into complex, authentic topics that matter to kids
- Flexible grouping, featuring small research teams, groups, task forces
- Heterogeneous, non-leveled groups with careful differentiation
- Student responsibility and peer leadership
- Use of proficient-reader/thinker/researcher strategies
- Drawing upon multiple, multi-genre and multimedia sources
- Going beyond fact-finding auto synthesizing ideas and building and acquiring knowledge
- Actively using knowledge in our school and communities; sharing, publication, products, or taking action
- Matching or “backmapping” kids’ learning to state or district standards

Devick-Fry (2010) explain that by using textbooks, teachers can incorporate science literature circles to help students discuss and understand the big ideas discussed in science texts. Literature circles can be used in science with the incorporation of science notebooks within the literature circles. The science notebooks could contain reflections, literature circle work, or other learning artifacts that aid in understanding the concepts. As students continue to deepen their understanding by increasing text complexity they become more well-rounded and diverse readers (National Governors Association, 2012).

Activities could be the same for content area literature circles, or teachers can modify the literature circle to best meet their students’ and content area needs. When implementing literature circles in a content area, teachers should select a short amount of text to read, activate prior knowledge and introduce key vocabulary. As students begin to experience the text, according to Educational Research Service (1995), students could reflect and respond to three items:

1. What have you learned from reading this selection?
2. How does the information in this selection connect to the other things you know about this subject?
3. List the words in the section that you do not fully understand.

After students discuss their responses in small groups, the teacher may either join in small group discussions or assemble a student led, whole-class discussion.

Literature Circles are an effective strategy for developing reading comprehension skills, especially in the intermediate and upper grades (Harvey, Daniels 2009). They promote active involvement and dialogue among diverse students that increases reading in the content areas. As more and more teachers across the curriculum use the strategy of literature circles in the content areas, students will acquire a deeper understanding of comprehension and reading skills that will benefit them regardless of the subject being studied (Gallagher, 2009).

The benefits of literature circles, Pianta and Belsky (2007) found that American fifth graders were spending 91 percent of their school day either listening to a teacher talk or working alone. As recently as the 1990s, schools were filled with cooperating learning, reciprocal teaching, flexible small-group instruction, literature circles, reading and writing workshops. However, the No Child Left Behind legislation in 2001, along with the standardized testing frenzy that followed its passage, slowly drove kids back to their individual seats for endless “drill-and-kill test-prep worksheets.” Deep thinking was replaced with shallow coverage of topics (Harvey and Daniels, 2009).

Our federal, state, and local governments and agencies are enacting legislation left and right in an attempt to hold every person receiving a paycheck for working in public schools accountable for the students’ success in reading. Layne (2009) agrees, and stated that disengaged readers are often forgotten by lawmakers, education pundits, and school
boards and the reason is simple: fostering a love of reading in kids is not a curricular objective. It’s not tested by the state, not a component of any federal legislation, and it’s not in the district strategic plan.

According to Harvey and Daniels (2009), with new leadership in Washington, there’s a renewed commitment to progressive ideals and plants for a new federal education policy. President Obama has requested that the new generation of Americans step forward and serve our country in our classroom. This brought a sense of hope into the mainstream classrooms of American education. The National Reading Panel’s (2000) has completed numerous studies that draw correlations between the amount of time children and young adults spend reading and their subsequent improvement in vocabulary development, fluency and comprehension.

With the implementations of the Common Core Standards, teachers found that literature circles can be adapted to meet the standards across content areas. Asking and answering questions about text, describing characters, understanding story structure, making connections between events, determining meaning of words in text are all items addressed within the Common Core for middle school grades. (Minnesota Department of Education, 2010).

Literature circles allow for text complexity that increases from beginning reading to the college and career readiness level. The Minnesota Department of Education announced that any text that a student reads will allow for students to increase and grow in their ability to “form and make fuller use of text, including making a number of connections among ideas and between texts, considering a wider range of textual
evidence, and becoming more sensitive to inconsistencies, ambiguities, and poor reasoning in texts.” (2010, p. 11).

One of the goals with literature circles is to acquire comprehension and actively use knowledge: “The deeper knowledge one has, the more analytical, experimental and creative one’s thought processes” (Costa, 2008, p. 23). Students also understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text, technique, process, object, statement, image, or situation; applying that meaning to their own context. Students learn to listen and respond with empathy to one another, they implement strategies that will allow them to become more critical and strategic readers, writers, and thinkers both in and outside of the classroom.

The academic benefits of reading and responding to challenging texts help struggling readers demonstrate the moves of sophisticated readers (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011). Readers discuss the plot, read closely, analyze character believability, the author’s stylistic techniques, make connections to their own experiences, and use the book as a lens for critiquing adolescent culture and exploring cultural issues. The benefits also include the appreciation of text-some of which are the first texts that students have read in years, or perhaps ever. Students also demonstrate the moves of sophisticated readers. They discuss the plot, read closely, analyze character believability, and the author’s stylistic techniques. Students make connections to their own experiences, and use the book as a lens for critiquing adolescent culture and exploring cultural issues (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011).
Additional skills that students use with literature circles are the ability to; monitor comprehension, activate and connect to background knowledge, ask questions, infer/visualize meaning, determine importance, and synthesize and summarize the text they’ve read. Harvey and Daniels (2009) use the comprehension continuum (Figure 2) to define how the above skills are used in literature circles. The comprehension continuum is used throughout literature circles to provide support to teachers to promote higher level thinking, which in turn will support students’ conversations.

Figure 2: Harvey and Daniels’ comprehension continuum (2009, p. 30)
Through defining and identifying the benefits of literature circles, middle school reading and content area classrooms will evolve to meet the needs of the students. Teachers will support students’ engagement and comprehension in text. Students will demonstrate comprehension and reflection of texts as well as build strong classroom communities. Classroom communities will produce active readers who promote civility and social justice. These student leaders will then transform the future.

The Power of Small Group Conversations

Steven Layne (2009) believes that increasing classroom talk helps to inspire a love of reading. We must ignite the flame, a passion for books, in an entire roomful of young people all at once and then take all the right steps to keep it burning. Through the conversations that occur in literature circles, students experience books in an aesthetic and powerful way. With the critical components for success implemented, it promotes a reason to dream for students, a book to student connection. Effective conversations in a middle school classroom requires scaffolding for students. Through the intensive scaffolding, students will participate in discussions to identify key elements that are included in productive and effective discussions. The research supports teachers and students in identifying the importance of questioning for middle school students and how the questioning supports discussions about text. The upcoming section also presents research that identifies key ideas for grouping students effectively for the most productive discussions possible. Finally, I explore research based-best practice strategies to assess student discussions and conversations.
Constructing small group opportunities in the classroom. Kids can operate productively together in small peer-led teams, just like adults do every day in workplaces across the country. This kind of schooling pays off richly for learners (Gallagher, 2009). Such instruction leads not just to higher student achievement on the customary academic measures, but to better social attitudes, stronger work habits, and more persistence in school. (Harvey & Daniels, 2009). Students can consistently and effectively work with every other kid in the room. But equipping students to do so requires a repertoire of management tools that most teachers were never given. If we can’t teach our students the social strategies needed for this kind of learning, disappointment awaits.

When teachers teach in whole-class mode, it’s impossible to reach every kid. When material is presented aloud, kids who speak English as their first language, or already know the information, or just “listen fast” do fine; those who don’t, don’t. Decades of research show that splitting kids into high, medium, low groups isn’t the answer, and in fact hurts everyone (Wheelock, 1993). The only conceivable way to meet every child’s needs is to break the classroom down into temporary, flexible, smaller groupings.

Many times while designing small group opportunities, teachers fear that students will not talk, students will have a difficult time keeping the conversation on task (Gallagher, 2004), or that one peer will dominate the discussion. Group size should be large enough to bring diversity of opinions, yet small enough to ensure that all students can participate fully (Educational Research Service, 1995). It’s important for teachers to
remember that effective groups are made, not born (Gallagher, 2004). It is important for teachers to identify, acknowledge and face their fears. Gallagher (2004) identifies concerns that teachers may have:

- People who talk all the time and dominate everything
- People who never speak up and let everyone else do the work
- People who always show up late and unprepared
- People who must have it their way
- People who are rude and put others down
- People who never listen and just wait for the next turn to talk
- People who don’t follow through on their commitments to the group
- People who always get off the topic and distract everyone from the work.

To help face their fears, teachers need to remember that small groups do work when the members share a repertoire of strategies that help them operate effectively. Strategies students depend upon, are mostly unconsciously and automatically occurring in classroom settings. With his study of group work, Harvey Daniels (2006) states that when groups start to fail, teachers become conscious of the skills that group members are failing to display. When the group struggles, teachers start to consciously tap into our repertoire of social strategies, to try and diagnose the problem. Teachers need to remind students of everything that’s still left on the agenda and to get back to work and on track.

Simply putting students into groups and giving them time to talk will not automatically result in higher-level thinking. When given the chance, students will “hitchhike” or “go along for the ride and not pay for the gas” (Gallagher, 2004,
As students repeat only what they’ve heard from their peers, higher level thinking does not occur. Another obstacle to overcome is having an interesting task for students will not generate better thinking if the group is not collaborating; and a group that collaborates well will not generate deeper thinking if the task is not taken seriously. Gallagher (2004) identifies four major areas of planning that help produce productive groups in the classroom; group size, group diversity, time and task.

Large groups can be good because they increase students’ chances for higher-level thinking, especially if the task is extraordinarily challenging. The more brains, the more brain power. Large groups can be problematic because it can be difficult to ensure active participation from every group member. In groups of five or six, it is easier for individual members to find places to hide. Groups of three eliminate hiding places and reduces students “hitchhiking” off of one another and copying what their peers say (Daniels, 2006).

It’s valuable to honor the experiences students bring to a discussion or a group. This way, students hear as many different perspectives as possible. Mixing gender and ethnicity when formulating groups helps to do this. As teachers mix gender in every group, a difference in gender can bring a difference in viewpoint, it is important that both be represented when students collaborate. Multiethnic, multilingual setting provides an opportunity for students to learn from (Gallagher, 2009).

If we want students to use the power of collaboration to raise reading comprehension, we must present students with challenging and interesting tasks (Harvey and Daniels, 2009). Literature circles may have the perfect group size, with a nice blend
of gender and cultures, a clearly defined task, and focused individual accountability, but all of this will be for naught if the group collaboration doesn’t promote higher-level thinking. To help students use higher level thinking, it’s important to set rules and boundaries for students to follow during collaboration (Gallagher, 2004).

Once assigned tasks, and understand accountability, students need to be aware of certain rules of group work before they begin. The following group rules are adapted from the work of Smith, Johnson, and Johnson (1981) and Gallagher (2004).

2. Be critical of ideas, not people. Disagreement is necessary and can be healthy if handled maturely.
3. Remember that we are all in this together. We are a community of learners.
4. Restate what someone said if it is not clear.
5. If there are two sides to an issue, try to understand both sides.
6. Listen to everyone’s ideas, even if you do not agree with them. It often takes more skill to listen than it does to share.
7. Let all ideas emerge.

With careful consideration of the grouping of students, reminding students of collaboration rules, and purposeful preparation, students learn to listen and respond with empathy to one another.

**Scaffolding student conversation.** The most exciting thing about conversations in the classroom is that adolescents who may be struggling mightily, still identify how their collaboration with peers raises their level of comprehension. The struggling students
learn through the thoughts of other readers, and they, too, embrace confusion and make informed reflections (Gallagher, 2009). As students discuss texts with their peers, they gain a deeper understanding of the text. The collaboration between students plays a key role in raising reading comprehension (Gallagher, 2009), and creating collaborative groups helps students embrace the confusion that may occur while they are reading. Giving students an opportunity for group discussion prompts students to identify their confusion and work through it. This teaches the students that they are responsible for making their own meaning, and their own learning.

Gallagher (2009) states that verbal communication comes naturally to our students, and sometimes we assume they don’t need much help with it in school. However, we must remember that effective conversations are not born. In her research on tough texts and talk, O’Donnell-Allen (2011) states it’s essential we provide scaffolding through an array of procedures and strategies to ease students into conversations so they can eventually carry it out on their own. We must scaffold talk for our students for them to actively participate in discussions with their peers. Before we begin to have our students complete literature circles, we must scaffold how talk looks for our students. By modeling the three types of scaffolding, students will discover how effective conversations transform their understanding of the text. Cindy O’Donnell-Allen (2011) identifies three types of scaffolding that teachers can use to support student growth in effective conversations about text: exoscaffolding, endoscaffolding, and metatalk.
1. **Exoscaffolding** provides a framework. This is a frame that teachers set up for the entire class so that students can understand the protocol for effective discussions and to learn strategies for carrying it out in small group and whole class discussions. This is teacher directed work that takes place outside of the student led discussions.

2. **Endoscaffolding** offers interventions. This is the occasional drop in visits teachers make during small group discussions to answer quick questions about difficulties in text, a time to restart stalled discussions or nudge students through a conflict. Teacher facilitation takes place within small groups and is tailored to the particular needs at that moment.

3. **Metatalk** enables reflection. This is a time when students are aware of the dispositions and strategies they’re practicing so they can use them again in contexts outside the classroom. There is not teacher facilitation directly with students. Students reflect on their own personal participation within the discussion process.

Scaffolding conquers the complaints that students may have while reading a tough text and amplifies effective conversation between students. Students begin to answer their own questions such as: *What does this text mean? What kind of text is this? Why is the author doing this? What is the point of this technique? Where is the author coming from?* These questions lead students to a deeper understanding of the book (Layne, 2009). As students answer these questions collaboratively, they elevate their reading comprehension, learn something new with every opportunity, establish connections and generate new insights in their personal reading.
The importance of questioning. In teaching children to become text analysts or critical readers, we must help them to ask the questions and accept that many of these question will not appear on the surface to lead to kinds of critical understandings we’re seeking. As students work with questions, both the teacher and the student learn to value and respect the children’s own agendas and not control the talk. Our expectations limit what we hear and prevent us from recognizing what children are talking about by causing us to worry too much about what we would prefer they were talking about.

When students ask their own questions in the literature circles, others in the group listen more closely and found it easier to respond than when they had to respond to teacher statements that began “I liked it where…” Students are more engaged to ask questions when they create their own which leads to, focus, following set agendas, and inevitably children are more interested in the outcomes and in the answers than when they had to answer teacher based questions (Gallagher, 2009). No set of questions or kinds of questions work better than when discussion questions are the ones that students want to discuss! Through the appropriate scaffolding, student based questions are appropriate to the context, the texts, and the children’s interests, they provoke useful discussion, and provide a foundation for pursuing critical understanding. When kids have authentic opportunities to read, think, and talk together, their curiosity explodes and their questions come fast and furiously. It is those questions that propel learners on, that gets them excited and engaged in the world around them (Harvey and Daniels, 2009).

Anne Simpson (1997) states that by mentoring student on how to ask questions, we help students gain some of the insights into texts and adopt new reading
practices. Students focus on questions that are understandable by their peers, interesting, and relevant to middle schoolers. When students are concerned that the questions were not meaningful, they won’t engage in the kinds of critical exploration teachers hope for. Simpson continues to acknowledge that allowing students to generate questions can be anxiety inducing for teachers however, as teachers set the stage for such learning, students soar to success. Teachers will hear and see students talking and sharing responses. Teachers will observe that students deepen their awareness, appreciation, and critical insights into texts.

Simpson (1997) identifies important ideas for teachers to use to introduce questioning. The use of picture books is a non-threatening text for teachers to begin with. This allows the ability to generate immediate enthusiasm and interest from students. Students are able to read the complete text relatively quick and review the whole book as well as specific features. Picture books are visual, illustrated texts where students seem able to step back and talk about how the story has been constructed. Gallagher (2009) and Simpson (1997) state that since the text is short, students have time to read it more than once which increases reflection time. As students reflect, they think of questions that focused upon what the author or illustrator was trying to do in the book and upon what they thought would be important to talk about.

The kind of questions that students formulate do not initially matter. The student’s understanding is developed through the responses they have to the text, not the questions. Every question or comment that the student makes provokes interest. The responses from the other children stimulate discussion that reflected the kinds of insights
that were “critical” (Simpson, 1997). Before we stop the discussions and expect critical 
questions immediately, we must allow for children to continue with their discussion, even 
if they weren’t always discussing important issues - important to us that is.

If talk is lively and around the text, it is apparent that there were valuable 
opportunities for students to gain experience, skills, and confidence. Cindy O’Donnell-
Allen (2011), reviews that conversations evolve as students discuss emotions, feelings, 
and strengths and weaknesses in society. This is when the teacher can step in and support 
the students in acquiring the language to talk critically about texts. It’s vital that we work 
with the questions, and value and respect the thinking that our students have. As 
mentors, we then assess the questions respectfully that our students generate supporting 
our students to set about the task with enthusiasm. They will enjoy the challenge of 
coming up with questions of their own, and the most exciting time is when students pose 
and explain their questions and other students respond (Simpson, 1997).

Assessment and evaluation of small group talk. We must be practical about our 
assessment and evaluation of student work in literature circles. Assessment is something 
that we do all day in our classrooms. Gallagher (2009), O’Donnell-Allen (2011), Harvey 
and Daniels (2009) review that grading is something that we do once and a while in our 
classroom. As we formatively assess our students, we use the data that is collected to 
shape our instruction. When we summatively assess students, we are not using the data 
to enhance instruction, but to report to others outside of our classroom how our students 
are performing.
Authentic assessment provides important information about our students. We collect data on our students’ learning and progress. We know how they are doing and what they have or have not learned. Teaching the same lesson over and over does not promote growth with our students (Gallagher, 2009, Harvey and Daniels 2009). We must redesign lessons, while keeping in mind what we have learned from our students and allow that information to guide our instruction. Based on our students work, we design the instruction tailored to what they need. Some are quickly ready for independent practice, and others need additional support, time and guided practice. We base our instruction on the conversations we have with our students (Harvey and Goudvis, 2007).

According to Harvey and Daniels (2009), as we assess our students’ thinking and understanding we must, once again, keep in mind the following:

- Read kids’ work.
- Confer with kids.
- Listen in on conversations.
- Observe behavior and expressions.
- Chart responses.
- Use available technology.
- Keep anecdotal records of conferences and conversations.
- Script what the students say.

All of the information and data that is gathered through assessment and evaluation allows teachers to determine whether students are making meaning and building knowledge (Harvey and Daniels, 2009).
Individual accountability and group accountability are two ways for teachers to assess student learning. *Individual accountability* is when each student in the group has to produce a product. Sometimes students have the same product, students may keep a record of their discussion, including bulleted items to represent the input of every student in the group (Gallagher, 2009). Instead of one person’s keeping a master sheet, every student is required to keep his or her notes. A way for teachers to hold students accountable is to select a random presenter for the group. Due to the presenter of the group being selected randomly, everyone in the group is prepared to share their findings.

*Group accountability* is when the group as a whole produces one product. An example of this may be when students symbolically represent the main character in chapter three of a text. Even though the group is producing a single product, each member is held accountable because they know that they will be required to share their group’s work, and they also know that the person selected to stand in front of the class to do so will be chosen at random (Harvey and Daniels, 2009). When randomly choosing who will speak for each group, teachers may use one of the following criteria to determine the presenter:

- the person who was born closest to our school.
- longest hair.
- shortest last name.
- most siblings.
- longest fingernails.
- born farthest from the teacher’s birthday.
One benefit of creating goofy selection criteria such as these is that they require students to get to know each other. When students know they may be randomly selected to represent their group’s thinking, they are more apt to participate (Layne, 2009). Even though group participation is key in literature circle discussions, teachers must focus on the individual assignments.

We must not set up groups where everyone gets the same grade, as this will likely fail (Harvey and Daniels, 2009). We must teach students to assess their own individual accountability. To help ensure individual accountability in small groups, teachers focus on thoughtful, complex and valuable learning for students. O’Donnell-Allen (2009) and Layne (2009) state teachers should use written work plans and checkpoints to keep students on task and focused on their individual tasks for discussions. Grading standards must be clear for students to avoid confusion of how the students are graded. We should not miss the opportunity for students to practice teamwork.

As teachers create a grading system for students, rubrics are a way for teachers and students to work together. In a whole class session, teachers and students can identify two or three key skills for each phase of the discussion and inquiry with a text. Teachers and students can then build the rubric so that everyone can understand the ultimate goal of the assessment rubric (Layne, 2009, Harvey and Daniels (2009). When it comes to the aesthetics of reading, we can’t give a test see how we are doing as teachers or if what we are doing is impacting students. Goals are not easily measured; hence they have not found their way into the traditional school curriculum which remains rooted in an exclusive focus on the mechanics of reading (Layne, 2009).
As Layne states: “We’re in the hope business. Fostering a lifetime love of reading in our students” (2009, p. 13). The challenge though is this: how do we know students are on task? How will we know they’re talking about books? How will we assess the quality of their discussion about books? What will the consequence be for not talking about books when we say they’re supposed to be talking about books? The strategies a teacher selects to assess the above questions will depend upon the texts she or he is using, the program, the class, what other resources are available, and the teacher’s own experience.

Through my research, I have identified ten possible activities to use while students complete literature circles. Critical questions can be asked of many kinds of texts and media and thus have a transferability that some of the other strategies lack. Questions can be used to formatively explore some of the other strategies (Harvey and Daniels, 2009, p 158).

- **Sticky notes** can be used to write formatively about ideas, questions, and comments that occur to students as they read, and attach these to the relevant pages of the book (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 68).

- **Bookmarks** allow for a reading schedule to be visual for students after they have determined their schedule with their groups. The bookmarks can also have a formative reflection cues for students to use as they reflect on their reading (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 97).
• **Quickwrites** can be used as a brief exploratory writing (and formative assessment) to help students rehearse their ideas on a topic or question before sharing them in discussions (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 61).

• **Save the last word for me** is a formative activity where students identify a thought-provoking passage from the text and write the passage on a large piece of paper. Group members then read and verbally respond to the passage being displayed. Group members could guess why the passage was chosen, or discuss why the passage is important in the text (Gallagher, 2009, p. 115).

• **Trouble slips** are a formative assessment that allows students to identify, write down, and reflect on a piece in the text where their comprehension falters. The students are then allowed to help support their peer. If teachers overhear that all of the students are struggling with this portion of a text, the passage may be discussed in a small-group intervention, or the teacher may explicitly teach this portion of the text to the whole group (Gallagher, 2009, p. 115).

• **Double entry journal plus** help students identify a passage they find compelling on the left side of the paper. The students then write and respond to the passage on the right side of the paper. At the bottom of the double entry journal, students take notes to summarize what the group members commented and shared about the specific passage (Gallagher, 2009, p. 115).

• **Group “exams”** could be used as a formative or summative assessment. The multiple-choice exam that students create, allow students to discuss questions about the text as well as clears up misunderstandings about the text. As students
later write and answer an essay question, students are required to use higher-level thinking. Teachers can assess the essay question summatively (Gallagher, 2009, pp. 118-119).

- **Visual interpretations** could be used for students to visually represent the symbols they capture in their brain after reading a text. The visual interpretations do not have to mirror actual images from the text. Visual interpretations could be used formatively or summatively for individual students, or group work. The visual representations may also portray big issues and ideas in a text. Students can show why the idea matters to themselves or to the world (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 74).

- **Dailies** are an all-in-one tool for students to use as they prepare for and reflect on their small-group discussions. Dailies also allow for students to keep track of their sticky notes, responses, important topics in their text, reflect on their discussions and prepare for future discussions (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 72).

  Assessment allows us as teachers to know what our kids are doing, and how well they are completing tasks. Assessment more importantly allows us as teachers to identify how effective our instruction is. Harvey and Daniels (2009) state that through revising and reshaping our instruction, we can continue to accurately assess our students’ understanding when they share their thinking with us.

  Not a single book on Earth is completely understood by any one person. Every one of us comes to the printed page with different prior knowledge and experiences, with different viewpoints and biases, with different insight and blind spots. Though we can
“comprehend” text the first time we read a text, deeper comprehension is more likely to occur when we discuss our reading with others (Gallagher, 2009). For students, many of whom may not be strong readers, the opportunity to collaborate and to have meaningful conversations when reading the hard stuff becomes even more critical. Discussions help with raising comprehension, elicit deeper reading, read challenging books. (Layne, 2009.) Through explicit scaffolding, questioning, effective grouping of students, and authentic assessment teachers will have the ability to continue to promote effective conversations with their students across content area reading, discussion and reflection.

**The benefits of small group work.** Students and adults alike do not think in isolation and in order to really begin to understand and act, we must engage with other people. We do not get kids into small collaborative groups for the sake of it; rather, the purpose of talking and working together is to ponder big ideas, issues, and concepts. While working collaboratively, students reap the benefits of true motivation, higher level learning, an increased self-esteem, and increased positive pressure to succeed academically by peers. Small groups as well allow for improvement in reading vocabulary, comprehension, and language expression.

Professional organizations that focus on education in the United States (the International Reading Association, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and two dozen more) have identified standards of “best practice” for education. Despite their wide range of curriculum interest, the recommendations of these organizations overlap strikingly. All the reports from the
expert groups say that a kid’s classroom experience should be more active, democratic, experiential, developmental, holistic, constructivist, authentic, expressive, sociable, reflective, collaborative, and challenging. The matchups between these elements and small group learning is so entirely evident. Virtually all the major professional groups in American education have endorsed a paradigm of learning that requires subdividing the classroom and putting kids to work in active, flexible, inquiring, hands-on teams.

Small groups are lifelike, no matter the job students will acquire later in life, collaboration and teamwork is key. Scientists and engineers work mostly in groups and less often as isolated investigators (Science Daily, 2008). The collaborative nature of scientific and technical work should be strongly reinforced by frequent group activities in the classroom, it’s a very different model than the individualistic textbook-homework-recitation approach. In many walks of life today, effective action happens when people work in small groups. Not only do the small groups raise kid’s academic achievement they also nurture effective work habits, attitudes, and skills. If you teach children collaboration skills like social problem solving, they not only become more cooperative classmates, but their pre-reading and other academic skills improve as well.

The Power of Tough Texts in the Classroom

Literature will change the world both in the future, and now. Young adult literature is powerful in helping students meet their academic and personal, social needs. Using young adult literature is the basis of success in literature circles in a middle school classroom. Young adult literature allows students to tackle and overcome social justice issues that arise in tough texts, within a safe classroom environment.
Throughout her research on tough texts and tough talk, O’Donnell-Allen (2011) states it is important to not limit tough texts to only young adult literature. There are award winning stories for adults that were not written with young adult audience in mind. Although it might seem unlikely at first glance, it is true that with mindful support, students can learn to acknowledge and negotiate existing tensions-within texts, classrooms, and the real world. Through the use of additional tough texts, students observe that one typically comes of age not just once during adolescence but several times over the course of growing up in our culture. There are multiple rites of passages.

Throughout the remainder of my capstone, I reference the term “tough texts,” a term created and defined by Cindy O’Donnell-Allen (2011). Tough text is the vehicle for meaningful conversations in the classroom. Tough texts meet the following criteria according to O’Donnell-Allen (2011). Tough texts:

1. treat culturally relevant and universally significant topics, issues or questions complexly and inspire engaging conversation about them.
2. include well-developed characters, many times adolescents, whom students are likely to care about and connect with in some way because of the choices and challenges they face.
3. display high literary quality as determined by narrative structure, stylistic features, and/or external recognition such as awards or outstanding reviews from reputable sources.

O’Donnell-Allen (2011) continues to discuss that one academic benefit of reading tough text is immersion in literary quality. It’s no accident that many of the tough texts
are young adult texts. As teachers identify texts to use in their classes, tough texts are a starting point to support authentic experiences and discussions with a text.

Tough texts may be intimidating for educators as they fear that young students are not capable of discussing a tough text due to the controversy that may arise. Although tough texts prove to be an appropriate choice for literature circles, we may need to justify our use of tough texts (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011.) Tough texts are by nature controversial, it’s possible that parents, administrators, and even some students might object if you assign them in your classroom. It’s important to provide choices, to provide an open opportunity for students to read. Providing choices among tough texts is the best way to forestall objections to some books. Using a number of texts in a literature circle setting, a range of books that might be related by theme, won’t make for students to have a diminished experience just because they’ve opted out of reading a book. The students will have the benefit of hearing about books they haven’t read from their peers. (Gallagher, 2009).

According to O’Donnell-Allen (2011) and Reeves (2004), although adolescents’ interests vary widely, they share an interest in the following fundamental questions as they read:

1. How do I become the adult I want to be, living the life I want to live, in the face of the obstacles I see?

2. How do I relate to others to get what I want? Do I dominate, submit, or negotiate?
3. How do I deal with the face that I feel in some ways as if I do not fit into my culture?

4. How do I meet the demands of my culture so I can fit in but also be true to myself?

By choosing tough text, students experience reading cultural contexts. Through cultural contexts, it helps us avoid the danger of seeing our worldview as the worldview. Tough texts let students live vicariously through other worlds and teach them to read with empathy.

It is no accident that some tough texts are written by authors of color and/or feature protagonists of color (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011). In Culturally Responsive Teaching, Geneva Gay (2000) summarizes the benefits of multicultural literature, which is many times considered tough text. Multicultural literature is a powerful medium through which students can confront social injustices, visualize racial inequalities, find solutions to personal and political problems, and vicariously experience the issues, emotions, thoughts, and lives of people otherwise inaccessible to them.

In tough texts, while the main character’s outlook has definitely changed by the conclusion of the book, readers are unlikely to find any neat-and-tidy resolution. In its place more often than not it is the hope that one will eventually occur. As teachers, we must allow and watch students wrestle with issues and questions that adults alternately come to politely avoid. O’Donnell-Allen (2009), states that young adult text, as well as tough text, teach students that “while life does not always have a happy ending, things
can get better. But in real life, you have to fight for them to get better.” (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 21).

These literary encounters help students become critical readers who learn to view the world from multiple perspectives as they construct their versions of the truth and make informed rational decisions about the most effective ways to correct injustices in their community (Diamond and Moore, 1995). Tough texts and multicultural young adult literature typically earn positive critical reviews, and many of their authors have won or have been nominated for literary awards that suggest their work will stand the test of time. Lesesne (2007) identifies that young adult literature has increased the literary complexity dramatically in the past couple of decades at the same time that its subject matter has remained compelling. Since the 1980s, plots have grown more reliably complex, the structures are more experimental, the settings more realistic, and the characters more layered. Kids will willingly read (or devour) young adult literature as it tests kids’ mettle as it pushes them to think critically and respond personally.

Besides teaching students to have hope for the future, tough texts also benefit the students culturally. The academic, emotional, and social benefits of reading tough texts within the classroom are high, but scholars such as O’Donnell-Allen (2011), Gallagher (2009), Layne (2009) and Harvey and Daniels (2009) have also described how certain books can influence students’ belief and actions beyond the classroom. Within the context of culturally responsive teaching, such texts enable students in some way to be, do or think differently as a result of the texts. The power of these books to create
controversy can also be symbolic of their powers to create change and to have an impact on adolescent lives.

Although some dilemmas in the text may not have an exact parallel in the students’ personal lives, by projecting themselves into the story, students are clearly able to wrestle with how they and others might respond to the dilemma they was in the world at large (Gallagher, 2009). The difficult choices and challenges that characters in tough texts face aren’t always neatly resolved by the end of the story. Even when books end on an ambiguous or down note however, they often demonstrate the great strength and resilience that humans, especially adolescents, can exercise in the face of challenges (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011).

As students engage in conversations about a tough text, they are enacting democracy by way of literacy (Gallagher, 2009). In the small space of a book club nested in the confines of a single classroom, students are thereby developing new mind-sets and skill-sets that have the potential to be transferred to larger spaces in the much wider world (Wood, Bruner, and Ross 1976). Students are discovering the great capacity of literacy as “a tool for improving the world they share, a means of making a better future (Bomer, 2007). As students describe a text in their terms, they bear little if any resemblance to someone else’s experience. Students make powerful connections with their peers.

The student’s own interests are the best starting point for a discussion to evolve. This allows for the students’ own experiences to be discussed. This will engage the students in learning and they will gain confidence and skills, as students are gradually nudged to consider textual features and cultural issues (Layne, 2009). As students listen
and respond to their peer’s interests and concerns about a text first, they are then able to support, encourage, and develop analytical responses as opportunities arise.

**Summary**

As literature circles are implemented in classrooms, they consistently promote reliable practices where readers explore texts they’ve chosen (Harvey and Daniels, 2009) in the challenging but supportive company of others (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009). The practice expands the purpose of reading from reading and comprehending a text to participating in a conversation with the other readers about the world as it is presented in the text. By engaging in this dialogue, students are no longer passive recipients of texts. Instead, students hold the power to question the author and the world. Through the process of effective conversations, students experience a transformation in their thinking which leads them to tackle and overcome social justice issues that arise in tough texts.

The important research began with Daniels in 2000, and has evolved to other scholars throughout the years (Layne (2009), O’Donnell-Allen (2011), Harvey and Daniels (2009) and Gallagher (2009). These theory of implementing literature circles in classes promotes and supports students to analyze and interpret texts based on their own experiences and the experiences of others. The application of a literature circles in the classroom may concern some individuals, but as this literature review states, through the evolution of roles assumed during literature circles, and the evolving roles of teacher and students, students will effectively participate in discussion and conversations with their peers to promote comprehension. In fact, this type of instruction is supported by the common core standards, and can provide a means to supporting a more healthy
democracy. This literature review describes practices, strategies, and other recommendations that support literature circles. Through using carefully selected texts, this process has the potential to increase students’ understandings of themselves and the world around them.

Chapter three outlines my plan for implementing literature circle practices in my middle school reading classroom. By designing a curriculum for teachers, I outline best practice strategies along with how to use each strategy. The guide supports both reading and content teachers as they implement literature circles in their middle school classrooms. Chapter four is the curriculum designed to support middle school teachers with literature circles in their classrooms. Chapter five reflects my learning and growth of knowledge based off of the literature review as well as the design of the curriculum for teachers.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Introduction

Chapter one discussed my passion for conversation and discussion between students in my classroom. Middle school students are social beings, as they crave to talk with their peers about what’s going on in their lives. Tough texts, and tough talks (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009) allow for students to read cautiously and to identify with the text. After students read the text, they are capable of transforming what they read into effective conversations with their peers.

The previous chapter includes a literary review of the scholarly information related to literature circles, including its definition, history, rationale, classroom applications, and strategies for assessment. In my writing, I noted many ideas from scholars (Gallagher, 2009; O’Donnell-Allen, 2011; Harvey and Daniels, 2009; Simpson, 1996 and Layne, 2009) that discuss and recognize the importance of use of challenging texts, talk, literature circle discussions and questioning in a middle school classroom. Through my personal journey of teaching reading, I explored literature related to implementation strategies that focused on student voice in the classroom when discussing text through literature circles.

To answer the question how can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?, I decided to design a curriculum guide. I created a literature circle guide focusing on building in purposeful
activities to promote effective talk between middle school students while participation in literature circles.

In this chapter, I describe the setting and participants that the curriculum design is focused on. I also describe the research behind the literature circle guide. I then define the literature circle curriculum design and the aspects that are included based off of best practice strategies. Finally, I evaluate the curriculum design based off of the research I conducted in chapter two.

**Setting and Participants**

The district I work in serves ten elementary schools, two middle schools and two high schools. The building I work in is staffed with 95 full-time teachers and a total of 150 staff members. The school has a high number of mobile students, as well as a large number of families that are low-income compared to the other middle school in the district. Over 60 percent of our students qualify for free and reduced lunch. 66 percent of our school are students of color. With a diverse population of students, our school has focused on a lens of equity for students.

Each year, there is a high turnover rate of teachers at my school. Teachers choose to leave the building to explore other jobs, due to the overwhelming challenges each day to manage behavior, as well as the expectation to increase our low test scores. Not only are teachers leaving each year, but in the past four years I’ve observed that administration changes are constant. The atmosphere of the building is at times very challenging to work in. There’s a feeling of frustration with all of the change as well as all of the additional responsibilities and programs that teachers are expected to implement in their
classes. With many programs to implement, teachers feel the pressure to meet standards and focus on test scores. This leads towards teachers using “drill and kill” activities of their subject areas, and student voice is becoming lost in the chaos.

In the 2014-2015 school year, I decided to change my position at my building. I left teaching reading and transitioned into teaching all grades and all content areas as the alternative to suspension teacher. Through my new role within my building, I teach in a self-contained classroom with students in sixth through eighth grade. The students are in my room for a minimum of two days and a maximum of a month. Students earn a spot in my classroom for either behavioral or academic interventions. I am responsible for students to have the knowledge and skills when the leave my classroom to transition successfully back into their general education classes.

I quickly learned that the planning for multiple grade levels and all content areas was going to be a challenge. I immediately began searching for high interest, culturally relevant text that my students would enjoy reading, while remaining caught up in their content area classrooms. While searching for the text, I wanted to incorporate the experience of literature circles for my students. The literature circles would not focus on reading an entire fiction novel since there wasn’t enough time with a high turn-over of students each week. I knew that the effective route to take would be to introduce non-fiction literature circles with articles and segments of text.

**Rationale for Literature Circle Curriculum Guide**

This curriculum design capstone focuses on developing activities that promote effective conversations in a middle school classroom, and the guide will provide support
for all content area and grade level teachers. The goal of the capstone will be to help other teachers implement literature circles and amplify student voice across content and grade levels at my building and beyond.

I believe that the research from (Gallagher, 2009; O’Donnell-Allen, 2011; Harvey and Daniels, 2009; Simpson, 1996) will increase student voice, effective conversations, and an overall love of reading for our students. As students interact with text in all content areas, students will meet their academic and social needs as a middle school student.

**Literature Circle Curriculum Design**

Although the curriculum guide contains many components, the guide is easy to use for all teachers. As teachers at my building already have many programs they are expected to implement, the guide is not another item to check off on the programs that are required at our building. The guide is available electronically as well as available in a hard copy format, a binder.

The goal of the literature circle curriculum is twofold: to incorporate the programs required by our district; but to also promote higher level thinking and reflection on texts being explored in classrooms with students. The design focuses on literature circles as the vehicle used to promote effective conversations. The first segment of the curriculum guide includes a detailed explanation to define literature circles based off of Harvey Daniels (2000, 2004, 2006, and 2009) and the purpose literature circles have in our classrooms Stineke (2004) and Harvey and Daniels (2009).
The second segment of the curriculum design provides research and explanations of how literature circles are set up and run. This segment will include guidelines for implementation in all grade six through eight classrooms. Teachers will receive coaching on how to use the roles of discussion director, literary luminary, connector, illustrator, scene setter, character captain, word wizard and summarizer (Harvey, 2004 & Wilson, 1995) only when intensive interventions are required. The curriculum guide will include research from Harvey Daniels (2006, 2009) on why literature circle roles will not be used throughout all literature circles. It is essential that teachers use the roles only when additional guidance, scaffolding and support is required. Teachers determine when additional interventions are needed based on the formative and summative assessments.

The third section of the curriculum guide explicitly defines the scaffolding that will need to occur for literature circles and discussions to be successful in a middle school classroom. There are three types of scaffolding according to O’Donnell-Allen (2011) that need to occur for student success. *Exoscaffolding* provides a framework that teachers establish for the entire class so that students can understand the protocol for effective discussions and to learn strategies for carrying it out in small group and whole class discussions. This is teacher directed work that takes place outside of the student led discussions. *Endoscaffolding* offers interventions which provides occasional drop in visits from teachers during small group discussions to answer quick questions about difficulties in text, a time to restart stalled discussions or nudge students through a conflict. Teacher facilitation takes place within small groups and is tailored to the particular needs at that moment. *Metatalk* enables reflection and is a time students are
aware of the dispositions and strategies they’re practicing so they can use them again in contexts outside the classroom. There is not teacher facilitation directly with students. Students reflect on their own personal participation within the discussion process.

The fourth section of the strategy guide explicitly defines the following strategies:

- *Critical questions* (Harvey and Daniels, 2009, p 158)
- *Sticky notes* (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 68)
- *Bookmarks* (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 97)
- *Quickwrites* (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 61)
- *Save the last word for me* (Gallagher, 2009, p 115)
- *Trouble slips* (Gallagher, 2009, p 115)
- *Double entry journal plus* (Gallagher, 2009, p 115)
- *Group “exams”* (Gallagher, 2009, pp 118-119)
- *Dailies* (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 72)

Master copies of the strategies with graphics are included. Also included are rubrics that can be used for easy implementation in the classroom. Teachers implement the graphics and rubrics directly from the guide which eliminates the additional time teachers need to take to prepare for the literature circles. The rubrics are used to formatively and summatively assess student work, then teachers use the data they collect to assess their instruction to inform their teaching for the following day.
The fifth segment of the curriculum design provides the top three lesson plans that are easily implemented across content areas in my building. The lesson plans provide an example of non-fiction text. This provides an opportunity for content area teachers to observe, and implement literature circles in their classroom without additional prep.

The remainder of the curriculum design includes an annotated text list for tough texts to use in a middle school classroom. By providing a list of text resources that is available for our staff, teachers will not have to search for hours on end for text that qualify as tough text. The texts will challenge students, as well as promote higher-level thinking and effective conversations through literature circle discussions. Rubrics are included for formative and summative assessments and blank graphics are included for easy implementation of the strategies.

**Evaluation of the Guide**

In chapter four, I evaluate the effectiveness of the guide. The evaluation of the guide will include reflection on the following questions:

1. Is the curriculum usable over many years and content areas, increasing knowledge and building information learned in a developmentally appropriate way? Does it allow for differentiation for diverse learners?

2. What professional development is required for teachers to navigate the curriculum? If it is necessary, how is additional professional development be provided?

3. Are the roles assigned to students following the guidelines of Harvey Daniels (2006, 2009)?
4. Are the texts identified “tough text?” (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011)

The questions are developed through researching best practice in literature circles in a middle school classroom in 2014. Through the research that has been conducted, I generated questions to evaluate the effectiveness of the guide. The questions answered in chapter four are based off of the research that I conducted as well as the limitations that may occur with the curriculum design.

Summary

The curriculum design guide is a support for multiple grade level teachers, as well as content area teachers. The curriculum is designed to answer the question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?* The best practice strategies that I’ve identified enhance student voice and effective conversations among middle school students through literature circles. The capstone identifies and includes research on best practice strategies. The curriculum guide provides five detailed lesson plans for teachers. The guide also provides an annotated text list, and additional text resources for teachers to find high interest text. The guide is not an additional activity for teachers to use that takes a lot of time to prepare, with little evidence of student success. Teachers use the guide as a resource to amplify student voice, throughout the process of literature circles, which demonstrates student achievement. Chapter four is the curriculum design and evaluation. The curriculum is explicitly laid out for teachers to implement easily in their classrooms. Chapter four provides key findings from my research and will detail the curriculum design based off my research. Chapter five reviews the best practice
strategies as well as the implementations for students and teachers. Chapter five also identifies the limitations of the curriculum design as well as future ideas for research as well as plans for sharing and communicating the results with staff.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

Chapter one of my capstone defines where my passion for literature circles and talking about text stemmed from. While growing up I was lucky to have the opportunity to read text that inspired my love of reading. I will always remember reading the stories of Little Critters and Winnie-the-Pooh and the Pebble Hunt sitting on my great grandmother’s lap and the love of reading that developed. This passion will always help me inspire the same love of reading for my own students.

Chapter two is the literature review that I’ve completed to support the curriculum that I’ve designed for middle school literature circles. This chapter identifies why literature circles are important and how to implement them successfully.

In chapter three, I discussed the new teaching role that I have at my building. As a teacher that supports students with behavior and academic interventions, I immediately realized the importance of incorporating literacy throughout all content areas. The curriculum that I designed focuses around the question: How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles? I designed a curriculum that would provide an easy, best practice approach to implementing literature circles in all classes.

In chapter four, I describe the major pieces of the curriculum guide. I also describe the lesson plan that is included for teacher use. The text set that is include is broken into two sections. There is a section that focuses on resources for students. Through the
resources identified for students, students have the opportunity to choose tough text that they would like to read. The teacher resources provide text lists and text that teachers can implement across grade levels and content areas. Each of the above sections are included in separate appendices in the curriculum design that provides easy implementation for teachers.

Finally, I reflect on the curriculum design. I answer how effective I was in answering the question *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?*

**Literature Circle Curriculum Guide**

The curriculum design is intended for middle school students grades six through eight. The design is focused on implementing literature circles across multiple content areas with a focus on effective, powerful conversations between students. The design of the curriculum identifies the purpose and need of literature circles across content areas to promote learning in peer-led small groups.

The ten best-practice strategies (Appendix E) that are identified in the curriculum design come from four experts in the literature circle field. Kelly Gallagher (2009), Cindy O’Donnell-Allen (2011), Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels (2009) are the four researchers that I will focus the strategies from. The strategies that are identified can be used cross-curricular as well as in sixth through eighth grade classrooms. The strategies are picked for the curriculum because they will increase the effective conversations around tough text.
The curriculum includes resources for teachers that allow for the integration of literature circles without major preparation. The appendix of the curriculum design includes group rules, role sheets, blank graphics, text sets, rubrics and lesson plans. A master copy of the group rules sheet is included for teacher and student use. The rules are a guide to set boundaries that support collaboration between one another (Gallagher, 2004.)

Literature circle role sheets are provided to be a model for what strong readers do when they sit down to discuss text. The role sheets (Harvey, 2004 and Wilson 1995) provide scaffolding and model how literature circles are run and what authentic discussion is like. Once students become aware of how literature circles are run, and the thought process behind an authentic discussion, the role sheets should be removed and teachers should implement activities that continue to promote higher level thinking.

I’ve included blank graphics of higher level thinking activities for students to deepen their understanding of the text. The blank graphics are to be used after the scaffolding of role sheets. I’ve included graphics for Sticky Note Bookmark (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011) Dailies (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011) Double Entry Journal Plus (Gallagher, 2009) Critical Questions (Harvey and Daniels, 2011) and Visual Interpretations O’Donnell-Allen, 2011.) The purpose of the graphics are to not limit student discussion by completing the same sheet each time they read, but as an extension of their reading to promote higher level discussions with their peers. As teachers formatively and summatively assess students, teachers can incorporate role sheets as additional intervention as needed.
Rubrics are included in the curriculum to formatively and summatively assess students’ knowledge and skill, organization, and language and mechanics. My building uses the philosophy of the International Baccalaureate® (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) (2014). The rubrics that are included are based off the philosophy and skill set of International Baccalaureate® (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) (2014). The formative rubrics are used to assess students daily on their discussions with peers. The information gained from the formative rubrics should be used to guide instruction and activities for the following days. The summative rubrics should be used to assess students as a final product. This could include discussions and reflections on the text that they read. The purpose of the rubrics are to assess students discussions, not the role sheets. The goal of the curriculum is to allow an opportunity for higher level thinking and discussions to occur across grade levels, and content areas.

Lesson plans. To support teachers across content areas, I created three sample lesson plans. I included a lesson plan for sixth, seventh and eighth grade. The purpose of including all three grades, as well as multiple content areas was to provide support to teachers. The lesson plans explicitly break down the skills that teachers will incorporate to support students with discussions in their classroom.

The lesson plan has six segments, each segment has guiding questions for teachers to answer. The first segment of the lesson plan identifies the content area, standard, reading strategy, tough text (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011) and scaffolding that will be used throughout the lesson.
The second segment of the lesson plan identifies the strategy that is used to support higher level thinking with students. Teachers also provide a rationale for why they are using the strategy. Through identifying the strategy, and analyzing why the strategy was picked, teachers have a purpose for their lesson. Although the best practice strategies can be used across multiple content areas and grade levels, some strategies work better with specific grades or with specific text. Through identifying the strategy and purpose, teachers minimize the frustration that could occur within literature circles.

The third segment of the lesson plan is an area for teachers to list differentiation and interventions that are required for specific students or classes. This could include but is not limited to, specific grouping of students, additional text resources, varied Lexile leveled text, the use of role sheets to support student needs. Teachers may also write down which groups they are going to listen in on a little more closely. The differentiation and interventions should be based on the formative assessments that teachers conduct during literature circle discussions.

Next in the lesson plan, teachers identify the procedures for the lesson. This includes what students will do throughout the lesson. This also includes what the teacher will do throughout the lesson. The lesson plans are not specifically for discussions so this segment may include how the text is broken up between days, and the higher level thinking strategy that students will use. Teachers can also identify if the discussion will occur, and if there are formative/summative assessments for the discussion. It’s important for teachers to identify what they are going to do during the lesson to support
students. If students have not learned a strategy yet, it will be essential for teachers to explicitly model the strategy. This would be included in this section here.

The fifth section of the lesson plan identifies how the discussion will be formatted for students. Students may be grouped in their literature circles or they may be mixed in with other peers to discuss a variety of texts. The discussion could be structured around a specific topic, or as students become proficient with effective discussions, the discussion may be peer led. Teachers will also identify what their role is during the discussion. Teachers must remember that when students are discussing, it is not time to check e-mail or continue to lesson plan for other classes. This is a time for teachers to observe and assess the conversations that are occurring between students.

The final section of the lesson plan identifies that learning of the students, but more importantly is a place for teachers to reflect. Teachers reflect on strengths and weaknesses of the discussions as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the text that was used. Through the reflection, teachers identify additional interventions, support, text or resources to extend and promote powerful conversations between students in literature circles.

**Text set.** Included in the appendix is an annotated text list. This resource provides material for teachers and students to identify and work with tough text (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011). There are a variety of resources ranging from websites to books. The annotated text list focuses on non-fiction text. The texts identified were chosen according to the criteria for tough text according to O’Donnell-Allen (2011.) Tough Text:
1. treat culturally relevant and universally significant topics, issues or questions complexly and inspire engaging conversation about them.

2. include well-developed characters, many times adolescents, whom students are likely to care about and connect with in some way because of the choices and challenges they face.

3. display high literary quality as determined by narrative structure, stylistic features, and/or external recognition such as awards or outstanding reviews from reputable sources.

The text set is split into two sections. The first section includes student resources that include websites and books. The websites provide the opportunity for choice in non-fiction text that students would enjoy reading about. An example of an identified website for tough text is Newsela.com. Teachers may assign students to read about a specific topic and students can then pick which article they would like to read. Teachers can also assign which article they want students to read based off of the Lexile levels of the articles. The non-fiction books that I’ve identified in the text set support the curriculum that is taught in my building. The text *Six Days in October: The Stock Market Crash of 1929*, is an additional resource for students to read while discussing the stock market crash in seventh grade Humanities class.

The second section of the text set includes professional resources for teachers to use to continue their own journey on teaching reading, and finding high interest tough texts. One example of this is the professional book *The Book Whisperer* by Donalyn Miller (2009.) This text not only supports the importance of reading and discussing text,
but the power students have when authentically engaging with a text. The book also has multiple text lists that teachers can use to gather additional high interest reads for students of all ages. The professional portion of the text set includes websites where articles are aligned with Common Core Standards, and specific reading skills.

There are an unlimited number of resources for both teachers and students to use for literature circles. However, the key to authentic discussions, and higher level thinking between students, is through the use of tough text which will challenge students’ beliefs and thoughts.

Reflection. Through creating a curriculum for middle school classrooms based off of the question, How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?, I’ve completed a lot of research but more importantly I’ve completed a lot of reflection. In chapter three, I identified four questions to evaluate the curriculum that I’ve designed. Through answering the three questions below, I evaluate how effectively I answered my capstone question, How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?

The first question to inspire my personal reflection reviews if the curriculum I’ve designed is usable over many years and content areas. As well as increasing knowledge and building information learned in a developmentally appropriate way for students. Does the curriculum allow for differentiation for diverse learners? I agree with Harvey Daniels (2009) and believe that the literature circle roles that are implemented as a piece of scaffolding limits students’ knowledge while participating in discussions by
only allowing for lower level thinking. However, I do believe that the scaffolding piece is important for effective literature circle discussions to occur. The additional activities included in the curriculum do promote higher level thinking. Being that the strategies can be used across grade level and content areas students are able to build on their knowledge from year to year. With activities and discussions being implemented throughout all grade and content areas, students developmentally mature as effective conversations are implemented middle school literature circles. The tough text that has been identified for students and teachers to use meet the needs of diverse learners. The text that has been identified is high-interest and culturally relevant for students. Some of the text is available in multiple Lexile levels, including the text being read aloud to students, and definitions for unknown words included in the reading. As teachers formatively assess students with the rubrics provided, teachers know which students or literature circles need additional support. This allows for intervention and differentiation to but put into place. Through the use of effective conversations in literature circles in middle school classrooms, students are able to build on background knowledge in grades six through eight and the needs of diverse learners are met.

For teachers to effectively implement literature circles around tough text in their middle school classrooms, professional development is required. In chapter five, I outline how the curriculum will be implemented in my building. The majority of the professional development focused on the curriculum includes staff meetings, discussion and reflection within the reading department, as well as in professional learning communities. Additional support and professional development will occur as teachers
and students need additional support. Future professional development may include additional tough text resources, or activities for higher level thinking that promote effective conversations in a middle school literature circle.

As mentioned before, roles for literature circles following the guidelines of Harvey Daniels (2004) are implemented for students in the beginning phases of literature circles for scaffolding purposes. Roles encompass the skills (questioning, summarizing, clarifying, predicting) that strong readers utilize. The literature circle specific roles makes these skills visible to the students. As students mature and become confident with the literature circle process, the roles are removed and are replaced with best practice activities adapted from credible researchers. The best practice strategies adapted from Gallagher (2009), O’Donnell-Allen (2011) and Harvey and Daniels (2009), that are described through the curriculum design provide students an opportunity to use higher level thinking which promotes authentic conversation in discussion. If students struggle and need additional interventions, the roles may be implemented again following the guidelines outlined by Daniels (2004.) After implementing the interventions, and students effectively participating in discussions with their peers, teachers can remove the roles again and implement the additional activities to promote effective conversations with their peers.

The final question to help evaluate the curriculum reflects if the texts identified are tough text based on the definition from O’Donnell-Allen (2011). The texts that are identified in the text set challenge students to consider difficult issues. This pushes students to think more deeply and grow. The text that are identified require students to
critically examine the text and participate in discussions with their peers. The conversations that the students have with their peers is not only preparing students for college but, preparing them with the skills for life.

While reflecting on the four questions, I believe that the curriculum I’ve designed answers my capstone question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?* Through the implementation of literature circles in middle school classrooms, teachers can help and ensure that students grow as readers. As students participate in literature circles in a middle school, they pose and discuss difficult questions, listen and respond with empathy and use strategies that help them become stronger readers and thinkers.

**Summary**

It is key for teachers to remember that when used properly, “literature circles hit on the main points that you need to read, think, discuss, and then reflect” (Moses, 2008, p. 2). If students remember those are the four things they need, they’re going to excel in every subject and every grade. While designing the curriculum, I focused on how literature circles can promote effective conversations around tough text. I focused on how scaffolding helps to increase powerful conversations with students. I identified strategies for teachers to use while implementing literature circles. The strategies extend student thinking past the typical group roles. Through identifying the importance of literature circles, the scaffolding, as well as the strategies and text, teachers are going to be successful in implementing high interest text in their classroom literature circles.
In chapter five, I summarize my key finding of my research. I discuss the major learnings, review chapter two’s literature review and consider additional implications of my research for teachers, and students. Then, I review possible limitations to my research. Finally, I review my plans for future research as literature circles are implemented across grades and curriculums.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

We cannot underestimate the power of human conversation, even and especially when had by students, for these conversations just might change the world (Harvey, Daniels 2009). I whole-heartedly agree that conversations between students can inspire, guide and challenge beliefs. I wanted my students to learn how to communicate with their peers effectively and in a way that will inspire talk outside of my classroom walls.

In order to provide my students with the opportunity to participate in powerful discussion and to have the opportunity to read challenging text my literature review helped me uncover the major learning of why literature circles are essential in middle school classrooms. I developed a curriculum unit for literature circles in a middle school classroom. In chapter three I introduced the building where I work, which includes the reasoning why literature circles needed to be implemented in my school. In chapter four, I described the curriculum I designed as well as the reflection that occurred. In this chapter, I relate my major findings and summarize my learning as it relates to my capstone question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?* The chapter begins with an explanation of the key findings from my research. Then, the implications of my curriculum design will be discussed. Next, the limitations of my design will be examined. Finally, possible future applications and research opportunities related to the topic of literature circles in middle school classrooms will be explored.
Key Findings

Upon completing and reflecting on the literature circle curriculum focused on effective conversations with tough text, I have identified three key findings. The first finding relates to the evolving role of literature circles in content area classrooms. The second finding relates to research based strategies that can be implemented in classrooms to support literature circle assessment. The third finding discusses the benefits of effective conversation surrounding tough texts. The findings from my curriculum design, align with the findings of literature circles in my literature review, in chapter two.

Literature circles in middle school classrooms. Based on my literature review and the design of my curriculum, I believe a teacher effectively implementing literature circles in a middle school classroom must be an expert on supporting students as they critically explore and understand a text.

Through my research, I reflected on the idea that literature circles allow students to choose the books or text they read and how they interpret the text. Students, like readers outside of school, enjoy the social aspect of book clubs. Most importantly, literature circles have the potential for “helping students become more independent and able readers of complex literature” (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. xv). Students will fall in love with text they have chosen and allow for discussion amongst friends consistently. According to Daniels (2006), the social skills promoted through literature circles help to grow more self-sustaining lifelong readers. As students’ engagement increases, so does their ownership of the literature circle and soon enough, students assume the responsibility of their literature circles.
When I first started researching content area literature circles I was concerned about how I would support teachers by finding a high-interest book, as well as the curiosity of how teachers would implement the entire book in their classes. As I continued to research, I learned that instead of choosing a single book to read, kids select a topic or a question to explore. When comprehension, collaboration, and research intersect, inquiry circles take root and grow our kids’ learning and understanding (Gallagher, 2009). Literature/inquiry circles are a key aspect to allow students to appreciate literature. Literature circles can be used across content areas as they are small, peer-led reading discussion groups (Harvey, Daniels, 2009), which will allow for comprehension, collaboration, and research to occur. It was beneficial for me to recognize that since there isn’t a simple template for readers or teachers to use, the importance of using literature circles across content areas is for students to have exposure and to appreciate different forms of literature.

Research based strategies. Another key finding from my research was the importance of not using literature circle role sheets all of the time. As I began to research more about literature circles, I believed that using the role sheets were best practice. I was worried how my students (many which are below grade level) would find success in literature circles if there wasn’t a model for them to follow. I felt that without the role sheets, students wouldn’t have a discussion in their groups. However, through the research, I learned the importance of using roles to scaffold student success. The important piece of research from the most updated Harvey Daniels (2009), identified the importance of including other reflection strategies to promote discussion between
students. I think the challenge of identifying best practice strategies was the large amount of strategies that were identified for reflection and discussion.

While reading text about strategies for critical reading, I pulled the strategies that were similar between authors. An example of this is that Harvey and Daniels (2009) implement double entry journals and Gallagher (2009) implements double entry journal plus. The two strategies are extremely similar. However, Gallagher’s double entry journal plus takes students’ work and reflection a step farther with summarizing. I believe that the ten strategies that I picked were strategies that are easiest implemented with fiction and nonfiction text. The strategies aid students’ reading and thinking critically. I believe the text that teachers use along with the strategies, students will build on their background knowledge to have a deeper understanding for their content. I believe that, through the use of the critical reading strategies, students are capable of preparing themselves for authentic, effective, meaningful and powerful conversations.

The power of conversation Through the research that I’ve conducted, one of the key findings I’ve identified is that literature circles can be applied to written text, images and media. I planned my curriculum design to focus on the elements of conversation that will provide rich discussions. Students analyze a text and complete a reading activity to monitor their comprehension as well as to promote talking point in a discussion. I believe that without discussions, literature circles do not provide students with the extension of learning. Students stay in their own minds and are not aware of the world
around them. The goal of the curriculum is to expose students to a variety of text and to provide the opportunity to talk about text!

Cindy O’Donnell-Allen (2011) reviews that literature circles are used to promote civility and social justice by wrestling with challenging texts on culturally sensitive issues, students learn to pose and grapple with questions. Students learn to listen and respond with empathy to one another, they implement strategies that will allow them to become more critical and strategic readers, writers, and thinkers both in and outside of the classroom. Although it might seem unlikely at first glance, it is true that with mindful support, students can learn to acknowledge and negotiate existing tensions-within texts, classrooms, and the real world (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011).

Due to students rarely seeing enactments of civil discourse in our culture, we must teach our students and equip them with vital communication and critical thinking skills. Through the scaffolding that teachers use, we help our students engage in honest, open discussion about the issues that are common in tough texts. It’s important to teach how to have conversations because “at least some of the conversations our students will undertake in the future may shape the society in which we will all live” (Probst, 2007, p. 45). If students are to participate in those conversations effectively, productively, and for the common good, they have to develop the predispositions the habits, and the standards that will make such participation possible.

Students are able to use the skills they learn in discussions across many aspects of their life. Discussions provide academic, emotional, social and cultural benefits for students. At the same time students are becoming more motivated, proficient, and critical
readers, they are also learning to view both the characters they read and the classmates with whom they interact more compassionately (Gallagher, 2009). By using texts to recognize their own humanity accordingly, students can tackle pressing social issues, one book and one discussion at a time.

Through the opportunity to talk with their peers, students learn something new every time - no matter their reading ability. As students engage in effective conversations with their peers, they establish connections, and generate new insights in their own personal reading (Gallagher, 2009).

Implications

My research has implications for students and teachers. The implementation of literature circles in middle school classrooms can benefit teachers and students. When students and teachers alike begin to examine their beliefs and question the way the world is presented through different types of texts, they will begin to see how they can act to change the world for the positive.

Implications for students. Small groups inspire students to work hard and allow them the ability to excel (Harvey and Daniels, 2009). Well-structured small group work enhances student achievement. The interaction between students helps ideas flow, makes the time go quickly, and leaves students eager for the next gathering. The application of a student focused literature circle can increase a student's sense of belonging and security, which will help transform the community of the classroom. When students are allowed to bring their personal experiences into the classroom, they realize their ability to impact
As students bring their personal experiences to the forefront, they feel as if they are learning something that truly matters.

In the curriculum that I designed, the texts that were chosen will allow students to explore multiple text sources and perspectives. As students learn through the multiple perspectives, they will have conversations with their peers, and will apply what they’ve learned in their own lives. One of the goals is as students respond and reflect on the multi-genre text they gain the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in all grades and content areas.

**Implications for teachers.** Literature circles give teachers the opportunity to step-back and observe the conversations that are occurring in their classroom. While I created the curriculum, I took into account the skills and activities that teachers need to successfully implement literature circles. I introduced the skills, the activities, and the text sets that can be used to support teachers. After students have mastered the idea and procedures of literature circles, teachers can continue to apply critical reading strategies to extend student learning for specific content areas.

Teachers can implement literature circles in their classroom throughout the entire year. The skills, procedures and strategies for literature circles will have to be explicitly taught to the teachers. The skills, procedures and strategies can then be applied in all subject areas. The exciting piece of literature circles is that the procedures and strategies don’t change. As students and teachers are aware of the concept, text can become more and more difficult or differentiated to meet the student's’ individual needs. The text that
has been identified in the curriculum guide is not a complete list. Teachers should continue to search for resources to best support their content area classroom curriculum.

**Implications for administration** Administration needs to be focused on the use of literature circles throughout the middle school classroom. Administration should be aware of the use of effective talk (Gallagher, 2009) within content area classrooms. Specifically as academic talk is used throughout the day with the use of literature circles across content areas. Literature circles in content areas provide the opportunity for engaging conversations. Administration will continue to support teachers, and will help to identify the impact that academic talk through literature circles has with students. Administration can help to identify how academic talk promotes students to become proficient with the skills of speaking and listening, and how the use of literature circles continues to makes the skills stick with students. Not only are students meeting the Common Core State Standards, but they are learning skills to help them through their post-secondary education.

**Limitations**

While my research was beneficial for my own development as an educator and the ideas could be applied to content area classrooms across my building, I acknowledge that it does have some limitations. The literature circle curriculum focused on critically reading non-fiction passages in content area classrooms. Although I identify fiction text that could be used, reading teachers may feel like they are using the resources that content area teachers need. An example of this may include a reading teacher wanting to
use a Science article from NewsELA, yet feel like they are stepping on the toes of the science teachers.

The curriculum unit focuses on content area literature that at times is very unfamiliar to students. As students begin to read a text and participate in discussions with their peers, a lack of background knowledge may limit discussions. If a text is used that students do not have background knowledge on, as well as a new strategy introduced, the conversations throughout the discussion may not be effective to identify the students’ true reflection on the text. Teachers could use a familiar text when introducing a new literature circle reflection strategy to increase critical responses that will lead to effective conversations in a literature circle discussion.

A further limitation is that I am utilizing current research. The research that I am using focuses on current literature circle and effective conversations practices. Overtime the research on literature circles and effective conversations will continue to evolve and grow. An example of this is how literature circles have continued to evolve since Daniel’s original philosophy in 2000. In future research, I plan to continue to focus on how literature circle roles and activities impact student learning.

Future Research

Exploring my research question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?* has lead me to develop ideas for future research projects for both other researchers and myself. Questions for the ideas I developed include:
• **How can tough texts be implemented into character education instruction?** Based on my experience teaching an alternative to suspension program at school, I identified the need to teach character education to my students. A future research project could explore methods for applying tough texts in character education and the results of their application.

• **How can tough texts and discussions be used to amplify student voice during research projects?** I wonder if students could learn more about specific research projects in content areas if they pick articles, share, and discuss their research with peers. Future research could determine if this is an effective method for promoting research skills.

• **How can literature circles be implemented into allied arts courses (FACS, Gateway to Technology, Art, and Physical Education?)** My research study focused on applying literature circles into content area classrooms. Future research could explore application of literature circles in allied art courses.

• **How does background knowledge impact effective conversations around tough text?** I felt like I did not focus enough on building background knowledge and the impact it may have on student learning. A future study could compare students’ ability to analyze tough text and engage in effective conversations where students have limited background knowledge on a topic.

The question that catches my attention the most is how can I incorporate literature circles into allied arts classes? It seems like many times while at staff meetings, the allied arts teachers believe that the majority of information that is presented doesn’t pertain to their
content area. Through discussions with allied arts teachers at staff meetings, they feel like they are alone and different than mainstream teachers, many times left out of the decision making and just expected to implement strategies or activities in their classes. My goal would be to help each allied art teacher incorporate tough texts and literature circles with their content. Some examples of this could include the use of text with the viewpoints of diverse architects for the TechEd teachers, or identifying resources about different styles of music that musicians play for the Band and Choir teachers. The overall goal of effective conversations surrounding tough texts would be to have literature circles implemented school wide. This would provide a sense of community, a common language and a passion for reading in all grade and subject areas.

Implementation

For literature circles to be implemented with fidelity school wide, the curriculum must be presented, defined and discussed at department, staff and team meetings. To implement the literature circles with fidelity and success, the reading department will scaffold the format of literature circles in their classrooms at the beginning of the year. Reading teachers will introduce group roles, scaffold, and model how literature circles are run and the power of effective discussions with students. After literature circles are introduced to students, reading teachers will remove the use of group roles, and will introduce the strategies identified in the curriculum design. Reading teachers focus on explicitly teaching literature circle expectations and procedures to students the first quarter of the year. With reading teachers using literature circles first, it allows for additional changes to be made to the curriculum before the whole staff implements
literature circles. This eliminates frustration with content area teachers, as many are implementing this model for the first time.

For the remainder of the year, reading teachers co-teach, model and support the content area classrooms as literature circles are used across curriculums and grades. Through the research and continued conversations at department and grade level meetings, teachers are allowed time to plan, collaborate, ask questions and reflect on the implementation with their curriculum. The majority of conversations at staff meetings focus on the success (or failure) of student discussion around tough text. The overall goal of the meetings is for all teachers to identify that through the strategies and text, the social skills promoted through literature circles help to grow more self-sustaining lifelong readers (Daniels, 2006) and increase content knowledge for our students.

With a high number of students that read below grade level, my building has many levels of reading to meet the needs of the students. The curriculum guide that I’ve designed will support the different level of readers that are in my building. With my guide being distributed to reading teachers at the beginning of the year, students of all ability levels will be exposed to the idea of literature circles, the scaffolding of effective discussions, and the practice of asking questions. This will support the content area teachers in grades six through eight, when the guide is distributed across all content areas. As the students in my building are exposed to literature circles, and effective conversations, implementation with content area text will ease confusion and frustration for students and teachers.
Conclusion

Inspired to share a love of lifelong literacy to my students, I explored the question, *How can I ensure that effective conversations around tough texts are taking place within middle school literature circles?* I designed a curriculum unit that focused on implementing literature circles into content area classrooms. Through the research I was able to draw several key conclusions that will impact my future instruction with students.

After explicit modeling and support, literature circles in content area classrooms are a tool for teachers to increase engagement with text for students. Literature circles allow students to be exposed to a variety of texts for teach content area. Students read multiple perspectives, a variety of reading levels, and recognize the importance of building a community with their peers.

Literature circles take students from simply reading a text to critically reading a text. Through scaffolding and support with literature circle roles, students move towards using critical reading strategies to increase their engagement within a literature circle discussion. The strategies increase comprehension, reflection and discussion about a text. The strategies support students as they analyze text and build knowledge on specific content area concepts. As students progress with the strategies provided, teachers can incorporate a wide variety of other critical reading strategies.

Literature circles support a classroom where students and teachers can both grow from one another. The conversations that students have with one another around tough text creates a space of empathy for peers. Students engage in open and honest
conversations about challenging topics. As teachers support students through the discussions, students are prepared for the real world, when difficult situations arise. As students are taught to question, discuss and challenge the world around them, they continue to influence the future of our world.
In small groups, we are smarter. In well-structured groups, we leverage each other’s thinking. We learn more not just because we all bring different pieces of the puzzle, but because, through talk, we can actually make new and better meaning together.

Stephanie Harvey and Harvey “Smokey” Daniels

by

Gretchen E. Enselein
APPENDIX A

LITERATURE CIRCLE CURRICULUM
Introduction

In your classroom: do you want to increase engagement? Increase rigor? Increase student motivation? Increase student voice? Provide students more choice? Literature circles are your one-stop-shop for student engagement and curriculum exploration!

Literature circles are an opportunity for students to critically read and respond to fiction and nonfiction text with their peers. When students actively participate in literature circles, a classroom community is built where students learn to respect their peers’ opinions and work towards a bright future. Within this curriculum you will find everything you need to support you as you scaffold, and design literature circles in your classrooms. There are several sections to the curriculum. Each section is detailed below:

- Research and explanations of what literature circles are.
- How literature circles are set up and run.
- How to scaffold for students to truly have effective conversations with their peers.
- Ten best practice strategies for teachers to implement in your classrooms.
- Sample lesson plans.
- Annotated text lists for middle school students and teachers.
- International Baccalaureate® (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) Rubrics for formative and summative assessments.
- Master copies of resources for literature circle roles
  - including graphics for the best practice strategies
  - Sample work.

This curriculum fits in with the programs our building is required to implement from the district. The literature circles are designed to supplement and enhance the current curriculum that you already use.

Teachers will have time to learn about each best practice strategy that is outlined below. Professional development will be provided for teachers. There will also be time for collaboration between grade levels and content areas. Reflection time will be provided for teachers and administrators to discuss the role of literature circles in content area classrooms. The data that is collected from staff meetings, and professional developments will identify the needs additional needs of the staff and students.
APPENDIX B

WHAT ARE LITERATURE CIRCLES?
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WHAT ARE LITERATURE CIRCLES?

According to Harvey Daniels (2006), in the 1980s, many teachers simultaneously invented the idea of literature circles. The new practice and idea of literature circles brought the established idea of adult reading groups into schools. As literature circles are implemented in classrooms, they are one of the most consistently reliable practices where readers explore texts they’ve chosen in the challenging but supportive company of others (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011).

According to Daniels & Stineke (2004) and Daniels (2006, 2009), literature circles are small, peer-led groups of students engaging in conversations around the same text. Text selection may be a range of materials, from poems, to articles or novels. Students are allowed to choose a text they would like to explore and gather with peers based on the text selection. Literature circle members plan a way to share highlights of their reading with the classroom community (Gallagher, 2009). Harvey Daniels (1994) believes that literature circles provide opportunities for readers to share multiple interpretations of a text and encourages individuals to make meaning from literature.
APPENDIX C

LITERATURE CIRCLE IMPLEMENTATION
APPENDIX C:
LITERATURE CIRCLE IMPLEMENTATION

Students do not know how to automatically discuss with their peers. They have to learn how to talk and share. It is a skill, just like reading and writing. They may understand the task and be motivated to complete it, but they often have trouble sharing their thinking in groups. To help students generate meaningful discussion, specific roles are sometimes assigned to students in groups.

Blum (2002) states that literature circles are initially taught through modeling, and practicing roles and assigned tasks by reading and discussing short stories or nonfiction text. When new activities are introduced, worksheets for literature circles roles may be appropriate at times for students to practice the new skills. Roles encompass the skills (questioning, summarizing, clarifying, predicting) that strong readers utilize. The literature circle specific roles makes these skills visible to the students (Gallagher, 2004).

Assigning specific roles may help students who come to us in the beginning of the year unable or unwilling to participate in meaningful group discussions. The literature circle roles below (Figure 1) are borrowed from Harvey (2004), Educational Research Service (1995) and Hey and Hanson (1999). The roles are adapted to meet the needs of middle school student across content areas.

Teachers need to be aware of how rigidly they adhere to the literature circle roles to help deviate from scripted discussions (Gallagher, 2004 and Daniels, 2009) because assigning specific roles may limit student thoughts and may lend artificiality to students’ discussions (Daniels, 2009). The purpose of roles is to provide students with models of what good readers do when they sit down to discuss text. When teachers provide models
**Figure 1:** Literature circle roles explained (Daniels, 2004 & Wilson, 1995)

of how literature circles are run and what authentic discussion is like, this should be seen as training wheels for guiding talk for novice readers. Once students begin to understand what strong readers talk about, these training wheels (role sheets) should be gradually withdrawn (Gallagher, 2004).

If we want students to use the power of collaboration to raise reading comprehension, we must present students with challenging and interesting tasks (Harvey and Daniels, 2009). Literature circles may have the perfect group size (3-4 students), with a nice blend of gender and cultures, a clearly defined task, and focused individual accountability, but all of this will be for naught if the group collaboration doesn’t
promote higher-level thinking. To help students use higher level thinking, it’s important to set rules and boundaries for students to follow during collaboration (Gallagher, 2004).

The following group rules are adapted from the work of Smith, Johnson, and Johnson (1981) and Gallagher (2004).


2. Be critical of ideas, not people. Disagreement is necessary and can be healthy if handled maturely.

3. Remember that we are all in this together. We are a community of learners.

4. Restate what someone said if it is not clear.

5. If there are two sides to an issue, try to understand both sides.

6. Listen to everyone’s ideas, even if you do not agree with them. It often takes more skill to listen than it does to share.

7. Let all ideas emerge.

With careful consideration of the grouping of students, reminding students of collaboration rules, and purposeful preparation, students learn to listen and respond with empathy to one another.

Once students become confident in how literature circles are run, and the process of effective discussions, students should capture their responses with alternative reading strategies.

The essential components of all literature circle discussions are that students observe, listen, participate and practice.
Steps that teachers can make to implement literature circles are outlined below:

1. Determine which concept teachers want to focus on (this could be a content area concept or a specific role or strategy that is explicitly being taught.)
2. Pick a text that is high-interest and content specific.
3. Place students into groups (groups do not need to be based on ability level.)
4. Assign a role or strategy for students to complete.
5. Read the text and complete the strategy.
6. Scaffold the discussion process.
7. Students and teachers participate in the discussion.
8. Teachers reflect on the discussion.
9. Teachers implement interventions.
10. Repeat.

The goal of this curriculum is that students will read text, respond to the text and actively participate in discussions with their peers. Students will become confident and proficient readers. When reading a text outside of a classroom, students will discuss the text with their peers, family or other individuals. The goal of the literature circles is that students will challenge beliefs and change the world for the better.
APPENDIX D

SCAFFOLDING STUDENT SUCCESS
APPENDIX D: SCAFFOLDING STUDENT SUCCESS

Cindy O’Donnell-Allen (2011) identifies three types of scaffolding that teachers can use to support student growth in effective conversations about text: exoscaffolding, endoscaffolding, and metatalk.

1. **Exoscaffolding** provides a framework. This is a frame that teachers set up for the entire class so that students can understand the protocol for effective discussions and to learn strategies for carrying it out in small group and whole class discussions. This is teacher directed work that takes place outside of the student led discussions (O’Donnell-Allen, p. 58).

2. **Endoscaffolding** offers interventions. This is the occasional drop in visits teachers make during small group discussions to answer quick questions about difficulties in text, a time to restart stalled discussions or nudge students through a conflict. Teacher facilitation takes place within small groups and is tailored to the particular needs at that moment (O’Donnell-Allen, p. 58).

3. **Metatalk** enables reflection. This is a time when students are aware of the dispositions and strategies they’re practicing so they can use them again in contexts outside the classroom. There is not teacher facilitation directly with students. Students reflect on their own personal participation within the discussion process (O’Donnell-Allen, p. 58). Scaffolding conquers the complaints that students may have while reading a tough text and amplifies effective conversation between students.
APPENDIX E:

BEST PRACTICE STRATEGIES
APPENDIX E:
BEST PRACTICE STRATEGIES

As people read, they encounter a wealth of information. As readers read, they may encounter details they already know, new knowledge, or some which may surprise the reader or change their beliefs about a topic.

As readers engage in reading, they often without thinking about it, concentrate on making sense of the author, double checking their understanding and pulling their thoughts together.

The process of synthesizing involves your mind operating on parallel tracks while reading. You are most aware of the what of reading: what the text is about, what is most important, what you should remember and what you should do with the information. Yet your mind is also involved in the how of reading: the ongoing thinking you must do to get at the what. You think of how this text extends your previous knowledge on a topic. Reading comprehension is the results of the thinking you do when you are engaged with a text (Buehl, 2014, p. 98).

Students are often unaware of their thinking as they read, especially the thinking that can guide and enhance their comprehension. Strategies that surface this thinking and encourage students to notice how they are reading can strengthen their comprehension abilities as they tackle the various complex texts for disciplinary learning (Buehl, 2014, p. 98).

The following strategies are identified as best-practice strategies that will incorporate higher level thinking and will prepare students for discussions. The strategies
are identified from four professionals that focus on increasing student voice, comprehension and reading skills for students.

**Critical questions** (Harvey and Daniels, 2009, p 158)

When reading in the content areas, we often share a sequence of three types of guiding questions that help us root out the big, important ideas—the *definition question*, the *consequence question*, and the *action question*. Definition questions ask what is happening. Consequence questions explore why it matters. Action questions probe what can be done. The three guiding questions lead kids to surface big ideas and underlying themes, and inquiry circles are a perfect place to delve into these issues, hash them out, and even take action.

**Sticky notes** (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p 68)

Sticky notes help students learn how to annotate without marring texts for future readers. Sticky notes are introduced by explaining the rationale for using them in reading. Each student received three or four sticky notes. As students read, they place their sticky note near the paragraph they have a reflection on. Students may identify a personal reflection, attention to setting, tracing plot, clarifying question, reacting to important quote, noticing details, observing author’s style and analyzing character.

**Bookmarks** (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p. 97)

Once students have learned to respond to text in open-ended ways using sticky notes, students can be introduced to the bookmark. The bookmark has three segments: a reading schedule, a reminder of procedures of using sticky notes, and a list of response prompts.
**Quickwrites** (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p. 61)

Douglas Barnes (1992) describes the potential of “exploratory talk” for stretching thinking, wrestling with challenging ideas, and taking the risk to grow. These ideas can easily be implemented by an extended writing piece, particularly a quickwrite. A quickwrite is a brief piece of exploratory writing intended to help students rehearse their ideas on a topic or question before sharing them in discussion. Students briefly write without stopping (five to ten minutes) in response to a written prompt you provided on the board, in a handout or online.

**Save the last word for me** (Gallagher, 2009, p. 115)

Each student is given a copy of a passage that he or she finds thought-provoking and writes it in large letters on a sheet of paper. Taking turns, each student silently holds up his or her passage so the other group members can read it. Taking turns, each group member verbally responds to the passage being displayed. The group members might try to guess why the passage was chosen, or they might discuss why the passage is important to the development of the chapter. After every group member has had a chance to share his or her thinking about the passage, the person who selected the passage (who hasn’t spoken yet) tells why it was chosen. The person who selected the passage gets the last word, responding to the previous comments and adding his or her own thoughts. The group then moves to the next passage, held up by another member of the group, and the process is repeated.
Trouble slips (Gallagher, 2009, p 115)

Students are given slips of blank paper, roughly the size of bookmarks. As they read, they take note of their trouble spots in the text-places where their comprehension begins to falter. When students arrive in class the next day they are placed in groups and asked to share their trouble spots with their peers. Together, they try to work through the confusion. This teaches students that confusion is normal; and, through discussions with their peers, students are often able to deal with their confusion without the assistance of the teacher.

Mark my word: Students use bookmarks to record interesting or unusual words. Periodically, students are placed in groups to talk about their words. Students are then asked to try to use some of their chosen words in subsequent writing (Gallagher, 2004.)

Marking time: Bookmarks are used to mark setting changes. This is an excellent strategy to use with works that contain multiple shifts in time and place (Gallagher, 2004.)

Character bookmarks: Students can track the characteristics of specific characters, noting key actions, dialogue, foreshadowing, and other literary elements (Gallagher, 2004.)

Any of the bookmarks, when brought to collaborative groups, will prompt students to participate in meaning-making discussion.
Double entry journal plus (Gallagher, 2009, p 115)

Double-Entry Journal Plus use reader responses to prompt essential comprehension processes, such as making connections to background knowledge, creating mental images, posing questions, making inferences, and clarifying confusions when thinking about classroom texts. Use the journal to prompt meaningful discussion. To use the double-entry journal draw a vertical line down the page, creating a t-chart. On the left side of the chart, they copy a passage they find compelling. On the right side, they write a response to the passage. In the lower left hand corner of the page, students take notes during group share. The students can summarize the main points, write down sentences to provide evidence they actively listened throughout the discussion (Gallagher, 2004, p. 116).

Group “exams” (Gallagher, 2009, pp 118-119)

Students are placed in groups and given an essay question. In ten minutes, they have to turn in a complete outline as to how they would answer the essay question. Usually students do not write the actual essay. Putting the outline together sparks rich group discussion about the text. Each group then share its outline with the rest of the class, and students take notes on the different approaches.

Visual interpretations (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p 74)

Comprehension involves animating the abstract language of written texts with life experiences. Visual interpretations trigger visualization for students as they read and learn. Students sketch a scene or event from the reading on the top half of the page and then write an extended response describing its significance on the bottom half of the
Students may acquire basic knowledge before they can successfully visualize about the text.

*Dailies* (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011, p 72)

Dailies is a four-column graphic organizer with room for individual response, discussion notes, and reader reflection. Dailies require students to 1) select a few of their sticky notes and elaborate on them in writing prior to discussion and 2) use metatalk to reflect on their group’s and their own participation after discussion.
APPENDIX G:
SAMPLE LESSON PLANS AND TEMPLATE

The following is a blank lesson plan template for teachers to complete and fill in as they are incorporating literature circles in their classrooms. There are three completed lesson plans that use nonfiction text, and one of the best practice strategies defined above.

It is essential for teachers to use familiar text when introducing a new strategy. It’s important that during the exoscaffolding that teachers use a text that students are familiar with to eliminate frustration and confusing. As you move through the scaffolding process, they can incorporate new text, as the strategies will become habit for students.

Differentiation and intervention Most strategies presented in this guide can be easily differentiated for the needs of students. Some students will easily be able to implement the critical reading strategies into the discussion to participate in effective conversations. Other students will need a lot of support to participate actively in productive conversations.

There may be times when a student is really struggling with a strategy and needs further interventions. If a student is struggling with the critical reading strategies, literature circle roles can be implemented again. Often times, with additional opportunities to discuss with their peers, peers can encourage the other student to participate. Teachers must monitor the interactions between students to ensure that they are appropriate. Through the use of formative rubrics, teachers not only prepare students for the summative portions of the class, but can support students along the journey.
## Blank Literature Circle Lesson Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Content Area:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standards:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Reading Strategy:**
- exoscaffolding (framework)
- endoscaffolding (interventions)
- metatalk (reflection)

**Text:**

### Strategy and purpose:
- What strategy will be used during the lesson?
- What is the purpose of the strategy-why are you using this specific strategy?

### Differentiation/Interventions:
- List differentiation/interventions that are required for specific students or classes that need additional support.

### Procedures:
- What will students be doing?
- Define what students will complete throughout the lesson.
- Define what the teacher will do during the lesson.
- Is there a discussion?
- Formative or summative assessments for strategy/discussion?

### Discussion:

**Students:**
- How are students grouped?
- What will discussions be structured around?
- How will students communicate with their peers?

**Teacher:**
- What are you doing as the teacher?
- How will you assess student needs?
- How will you provide interventions?
- How will you evaluate the effectiveness of discussion?

### Teacher Reflection
- What went well?
• Additional resources for next time?
• Additional interventions for specific students or groups?
• Were discussions effective surrounding the text? Additional support needed?
• Any other reflections?
Literature Circle Sample Lesson Plan #1

Content Area: 7th Grade Humanities
Standard: 7.1.3.4.1

Individuals in a republic have rights, duties and responsibilities.

Critical Reading Strategy: Sticky Note Reading (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 68)
Scaffolding used (circle one): exoscaffolding (framework)
endoscaffolding (interventions)
metatalk (reflection)

Text: Supreme Court upholds health care law's financial help to consumers
(Associated Press, adapted by NewsELA staff, 2015)

Strategy and purpose:

Sticky Notes
Sticky notes will be used for students to make comments, question, and make notes on
the text. Students will write a connection to their lives or another text on a sticky note
at the end of the reading.

Differentiation/Interventions: List differentiation/interventions that are required for
specific students or classes that need additional support.

Procedures:

- Explain purpose for sticky note strategy.
- Distribute sticky notes and text.
- Students begin reading.
- As students read, they pull off a sticky note, make a comment related to the
  reading and attach it on the page.
  - Teacher walk around and monitor strategy use.
  - Provide one-on-one interventions if needed.
- Follow-up discussion-use sticky note comments related to the reading.
- Students are formatively assessed on the strategy use.

Discussion:

Students:
- Work together in random groups of 3-4 students.
- Each student shares and explains two sticky note marks they made while
  reading the text.
- Each student shares their connection to the text.

Teacher:
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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Move from group to group.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Assess student needs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Provide interventions as needed.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formatively assess class discussions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Reflection</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What went well?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Additional resources for next time?</td>
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<td>Additional interventions for specific students or groups?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Were discussions effective surrounding the text? Additional support needed?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Any other reflections?</td>
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<td>Literature Circle Sample Lesson Plan #2</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Content Area:</strong> 8th Grade Science</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Standard:</strong> 8.3.3.1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Earth is the third planet from the sun in a system that includes the moon, the sun, seven other planets and their moons, and smaller objects.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Critical Reading Strategy:</strong> Visual Interpretations (O’Donnell-Allen, 2009, p 74)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolding used (circle one):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- exoscaffolding (framework)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- endoscaffolding (interventions)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- metatalk (reflection)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Text:</strong> <em>Eureka! Astronomers figure out distance to the earliest galaxy yet.</em> (Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff, 2015)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy and purpose:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Interpretations of Text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instead of students writing down words, they respond graphically. A simple sketch, cartoon, or stick figure drawing works. It’s not important to make the prettiest picture, but to use this strategy to capture something important from the text and the students’ thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiation/Interventions:</strong> List differentiation/interventions that are required for specific students or classes that need additional support.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Explain purpose for visual interpretations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Explicitly model the strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Students turn.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- You can do any kind of drawing you like:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A scene, character, moment or event from the story</td>
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<tr>
<td>- an image or picture that came to mind while you were reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>- An abstract form that represents a thought or feeling you get from the reading.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Write an explanation of the drawing. Why does the picture look the way it does?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Walk around and monitor strategy use.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Provide one-on-one interventions if needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Help students with a blank page.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Remind them to pick out one thing from the text to work with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- If a continued struggle, assign an event in the text for the student to draw.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
- Follow-up discussion-use visual interpretations for comments related to the reading.
- Students are summatively assessed on the strategy use.

### Discussion:

#### Students:
- Work together in random groups of 3-4 students.
- Take turns showing picture to the group.
- Don’t say anything at first.
- Other students guess what the picture represents.
- Tell people what picture is about.

#### Teacher:
- Move from group to group.
- Assess student needs.
- Provide interventions as needed.
- Formatively assess class discussions.

### Teacher Reflection
- What went well?
- Additional resources for next time?
- Additional interventions for specific students or groups?
- Were discussions effective surrounding the text? Additional support needed?
- Any other reflections?
Literature Circle Sample Lesson Plan #3

**Content Area:** 6th Grade Math  
**MN Standard:** 6.1.2

Understand the concept of ratio and its relationship to fractions and to the multiplication and division of whole numbers. Use ratios to solve real-world and mathematical problems.

**Critical Reading Strategy:** Save the Last Word for Me (Gallagher, 2009, p 115)  
**Scaffolding used (circle one):** exoscaffolding (framework)  
endoscaffolding (interventions)  
metatalk (reflection)

**Text:** With minimum wage rising, is America ready for $15-an-hour working world?  
(Los Angeles Times, adapted by Newsela staff, 2015)

**Strategy and purpose:**  
Save the Last Word for Me

This discussion technique encourages meaningful classroom conversations by identifying differing opinions and interpretations of text. Asking students to think about their reading stimulates reflection and helps to develop active and thoughtful readers.

**Differentiation/Interventions:** List differentiation/interventions that are required for specific students or classes that need additional support.

**Procedures:**

- Explain purpose for save the last word for me.
- Read assigned section of text. Students find two to three quotes from the text that are interesting.
- Pass out index cards or slips of paper to each student, one card for each quote they have found.
- On one side of the card, students to write down the statements from the text.
- On the other side, students write any comments or feelings about their statements.

**Teacher**

- Walk around and monitor strategy use.
- Provide one-on-one interventions if needed.
  - Help students with a blank page.
  - Remind them to pick out one thing from the text to work with.
  - If a continued struggle, assign an event in the text for the student to draw.
- Follow-up discussion-use visual interpretations for comments related to the reading.
- Students are summatively assessed on the strategy and discussion.

**Discussion:**

**Students:**
- Work together in random groups of 3-4 students.
- All students in the group are allowed to share one of their quote cards. The first student reads one of their quotes to the group and shows where to locate it in the text.
- Don’t say anything at first.
- Other students give their reaction to the text.
- Student then shares their personal reaction to the text.
- Repeat until all students have shared.

**Teacher:**
- Move from group to group.
- Assess student needs.
- Provide interventions as needed.
- Formatively assess class discussions.

**Teacher Reflection**
- What went well?
- Additional resources for next time?
- Additional interventions for specific students or groups?
- Were discussions effective surrounding the text? Additional support needed?
- Any other reflections?
APPENDIX H

TEXT SETS
APPENDIX H: TEXT SETS

An annotated text set is below for teacher use. The following is a diverse text set that is a collection of resources from different genres, media and levels of reading difficulty. The text set is designed to support learning among readers with a range of experiences and interests. The text set sources can be used across content and grade levels.

When we teach with inquiry, we must offer our students genuine choice and responsibility with the text they read. For additional resources review the Appendices in *Comprehension and Collaboration-Inquiry Circles in Action* by Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels (2011).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Resources for Tough Texts (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APA Citation: Armstrong, Jennifer. The American Story: 100 True Tales from American History. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary: Tales of triumph and tragedy for inventors, athletes, abolitionists, artists, and many more. These one-page narratives could be read aloud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA Citation: Ash, Russell. The Top 10 of Everything. London: Hamlyn, published yearly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Summary:** A collection of facts on the top ten of lots of topics. Published annually and released as specific country editions. Includes color photographs and illustrations.  
APA Citation: Atkins, S. Beth. *Voices from the Fields* Boston: Little, Brown, 2000. |
|---|
| **Summary:** Vignettes of migrant children and young adults who tell about their experiences living and moving around as the children of farm workers. The ties and values of Hispanic families come through in poems and interviews, as does the strain of moving constantly to new places and being poor in affluent cultures.  
| **Summary:** The authors puts a human face on the crisis with personal stories throughout the text. Chapters follow the six days surrounding the crash. Archival photographs, cartoons, and documents are featured.  
APA Citation: Denenberg, Dennis, and Lorraine Roscoe. *50 American Heroes Every Kid Should Meet.* Minneapolis, MN: Millbrook Press, 2006. |
| **Summary:** Interesting collection of heroes who give of themselves to make the world a better place. Scientists, journalists, teachers, innovators, and athletes are... |
included, some well-known, some not. Brief text will encourage further study of these people.


Summary: For people who want to know how and when things began, where they came from, and why they started. Includes “questionable” origins throughout history.


Summary: The black experience in America is chronicled in this book of powerful speeches and writing from figures such as Rosa Parks, Paul Robeson, Thurgood Marshall and many more. Each piece of writing culminated with a short author biography and a description of the response engendered by the piece.


Summary: A guide to secret writing. Details the history of code writing, famous codes, and invisible ink recipes, as well as how to crack codes and make your own. Full sketches, codes, and deciphering exercises.
Summary: Tweentribune.com is a daily news site for kids, tweens and teens. The news stories are compelling, relevant, and interesting for kids. The stories are selected by professional journalists that work closely with teens. An additional feature of this website is that the articles are available in four different Lexile levels. With the opportunity for differentiation, students of all reading abilities will read the same content successfully. Students may also post comments to articles they enjoyed to encourage similar news stories to be picked the following day.

Summary: NewsELA is a website that offers free news articles for teachers and students. There are articles across content areas that are updated weekly. One feature of the resource is that articles are available in multiple Lexile levels. Students read the same article with differentiated text. There are quizzes that are available for some of the articles. The website features non-fiction articles that are great for content area literature circles. The articles are aligned with the Common Core Standards.

Summary: Text is based on the diary kept by a third-grade class taught by Anne Yamauchi in 1943 at the Topaz internment camp. The book describes, from a child’s point of view, how Miss Yamauchi and her students tried to continue with normal school life despite difficult conditions.

Professional Resources for Tough Texts (O’Donnell-Allen, 2011)

APA Citation: (2015, February 13). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://www.thinkcerca.com/

Summary: It has a different mix of nonfiction articles. ThinkCERCA also provides an audio feature that reads each article aloud to students. This feature supports students in reading higher lexiled text that they may not feel comfortable reading independently. ThinkCERCA also has an embedded dictionary within each article. Students may click on the highlighted word, hear it read aloud, and see a definition for the word.


Summary: Curriculet.com is a list of texts. The list includes novels, non-fiction, articles and more. The texts are great for literature circles as they include high
interest reads for students. The website includes curriculum designs for specific text including additional resources like videos, poems, and reflection questions. An additional feature for this site is teachers can either rent or download the text that is recommended on the site.

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary: The resource compiles fiction and non-fiction text into text sets for students. The text set lists books, videos, and articles that formulate a text set for students. After the text set list, articles are included that have been modified by teachers for easier readability for students.</td>
</tr>
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| APA Citation: Home | AVID Weekly. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from [http://www.avidweekly.org](http://www.avidweekly.org) |
| --- |
| Summary: The school must have a subscription to this resource. The resource includes current newspaper articles and images from the Washington Post/Bloomberg News and Tribune News Services. The resource also includes scaffolded articles for English Language learners. The news articles are for all content areas and new articles are sent out monthly. |
### APA Citation: Institute, S. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://tweentribune.com/

Summery: Tweentribune.com is a daily news site for kids, tweens and teens. The news stories are compelling, relevant and interesting for kids. The stories are selected by professional journalists that work closely with teens. An additional feature of this website is that the articles are available in four different Lexile levels. With the opportunity for differentiation, students of all reading abilities will read the same content successfully. Students may also post comments to articles they enjoyed to encourage similar news stories to be picked the following day.

### APA Citation: Middle School Nonfiction Text Sets. (2014). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from [http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/resources/booklists/nonfiction sets/Middle_School_Nonfiction_Text_Sets.pdf](http://readingandwritingproject.com/public/resources/booklists/nonfiction sets/Middle_School_Nonfiction_Text_Sets.pdf)

Summary: The resource compiles fiction and non-fiction texts into text sets for students. The text set lists books, videos, and articles that formulate a text set for students. After the text set list, articles are included that have been modified by teachers for easier readability for students.

Summary: This resource for teacher is based off of Atwell (2007), Allen (2000), Fountas and Pinnell (2001), and Keene and Zimmerman (2007). Donalyn Miller found herself transforming her traditional reading classroom into a learning workshop. Throughout the book, Miller (2009) references many high-interest texts for teachers to incorporate in their classrooms. The book also includes multiple pages of recommended fiction and non-fiction text.


Summary: Donalyn Miller’s (2014) second book that offers additional texts and resources to develop, encourage and promote key reading habits. Strategies and comprehensive recommended book lists are included in this text.

APA Citation: Newsela | Nonfiction Literacy and Current Events. (2015). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from https://newsela.com/

Summary: NewsELA is a website that offers free news articles for teachers and students. There are articles across content areas that are updated weekly. One feature of the resource is that articles are available in multiple Lexile levels. Students read the same article with differentiated text. There are quizzes that are available for some of the articles. The website features non-fiction articles that are great for content area literature circles. The articles are aligned with the Common Core Standards.
APA Citation: ReadWorks.org | The Solution to Reading Comprehension. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://www.readworks.org/

Summary: ReadWorks provides fiction and non-fiction articles that focus on specific reading skills. Teachers can search by keyword, Lexile level, and reading skill. There are dozens of skills to target specific reading skills for students. Articles are short in length (ranging from ¾ a page to 2 pages) which leads to the ability to discuss and analyze the text more frequently than a fiction book. The articles are aligned with the Common Core Standards.

APA Citation: Vale Middle School. (2015). Retrieved June 1, 2015, from http://vms.vale.k12.or.us/articles-week

Summary: High interest non-fiction articles for upper middle school. The articles are printable and are picked based off of Gallagher (2009) and the Common Core Standards. Articles could be used weekly (Gallagher, 2009) or more frequently. A rubric and a graphic organizer are available from this resource.
APPENDIX I
BLANK GRAPHICS
SAMPLE ACTIVITIES
HELPFUL HINTS
APPENDIX I:
BLANK GRAPHICS AND SAMPLES

The graphics that are below support the rules for literature circles. Also included are the master copies for literature circles roles. The graphics also include the master copies for the critical reading strategies for students to use once they have mastered the procedure of literature circles. Samples for each role sheet and graphic are included for scaffolding purposes. Blank rubrics are included for teachers to use for assessment.
1. No hitchhiking. Everyone participates.

2. Be critical of ideas, not people. Disagreement is necessary and can be healthy if handled maturely.

3. Remember that we are all in this together. We are a community of learners.

4. Restate what someone said if it is not clear.

5. If there are two sides to an issue, try to understand both sides.

6. Listen to everyone’s ideas, even if you do not agree with them. It often takes more skill to listen than it does to share.

7. Let all ideas emerge.

Adapted from: Smith, Johnson, and Johnson (1981) and Gallagher (2009).
Discussion Director (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

Create at least 5 questions that require more than a one word answer and isn’t something that is easily found in the book.

1.______________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
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2.______________________________________________________________________
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3.______________________________________________________________________
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4.______________________________________________________________________
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5.______________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________________
Discussion Director (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

Create at least 5 questions that require more than a one word answer and isn’t something that is easily found in the book.

1. Predict why prescription drugs are called the “silent epidemic.”

2. Why do you think teens misuse/abuse prescription drugs? Do you think that is okay for teens to do?

3. When might prescription drugs be good to use? Why?

4. How could you support a family or friend that is struggling with drug abuse?

5. The article uses the world “excruciating” to describe how the young lady felt, when was a time you had excruciating pain?

Questions based off article: Good Teens Turned Drug Addicts, Scholastic Choices, October 2014.
Helpful Hints for Discussion Director:

Teachers can use Webb’s Depth of Knowledge to help support and extend student thinking. The question stems can help provide intervention and support for students that struggle to write their own questions.

**DOK Question Stems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOK 1</th>
<th>DOK 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Can you recall___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• When did ___ happen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who was ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can you recognize ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How can you find the meaning of ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you recall ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you select ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you write ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What might you include on a list about ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Who discovered ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is the formula for ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Can you identify ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you describe ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you explain how ___ affected ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you apply what you learned to develop ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you compare ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contrast ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you classify ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How are ___ alike? Different?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How would you classify the type of ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What can you say about ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you summarize ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you summarize ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What steps are needed to edit ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• When would you use an outline to ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How would you estimate ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How could you organize ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What would you use to classify ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What do you notice about ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DOK 3</th>
<th>DOK 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How is ___ related to ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What conclusions can you draw ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you adapt ___ to create a different ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• How would you test ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Can you predict the outcome if ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What is the best answer? Why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What conclusion can be drawn from these three texts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is your interpretation of this text? Support your rationale.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you describe the sequence of ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What facts would you select to support ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you elaborate on the reason ___?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What would happen if ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you formulate a theory for ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How would you test ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can you elaborate on the reason ___?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Depth of Knowledge - Descriptors, Examples and Question Stems for Increasing Depth of Knowledge in the Classroom Developed by Dr. Norman Webb and Flow Chart developed by Myra Collins
### Literary Luminary (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page Number</th>
<th>The Quote</th>
<th>Who Said It</th>
<th>Why Is This Quote Important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page Number</td>
<td>The Quote</td>
<td>Who Said It</td>
<td>Why Is This Quote Important?</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Some never use drugs/alcohol and get addicted to pain killers.”</td>
<td>Dr. Kolodny</td>
<td>When people lack the knowledge of what pain pills do to their brains. With the lack of knowledge, some people become addicted to pain pills without ever using any other mood altering chemicals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“These drugs do the same thing to your brain as heroin.”</td>
<td>Dr. Pasterb</td>
<td>The power of the pain pills is not something to take lightly. It’s important for people to know the side effects of pain pills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Prescription painkillers mess up the reward system in the brain.”</td>
<td>Dr. Pasterb</td>
<td>This quote shows how the road to illegal drug use (like heroin) may begin with teens due to the “feel good” feelings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Teens think they can stop when they want to.”</td>
<td>Brittany</td>
<td>From a first person point of view, Brittany points out the power of addiction in a teenager’s life. She mentors others and lets they know that the painkillers take over, and although teens think they know when they can stop, they can’t.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Literary Luminary Text:** *Good Teens Turned Drug Addicts*, Scholastic Choices, October 2014.
Helpful Hints for
Literary Luminary:

Text marks (Harvey and Daniels, 2009) allow for students to glance at the text to identify important quotations.

X- Contradicts my expectations

*- This is important

?- I have a question

??- I'm confused or puzzled

!- This is surprising or exciting to me

L- I learned something new
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Says Page Number</th>
<th>My Connection And An Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Connector (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Says Page Number</th>
<th>My Connection And An Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“He could taste the salt of his sweat as it trickled down his lip.” Page 4</td>
<td>I can connect to being outside while it’s extremely hot with sweat dripping everywhere and wondering how I’ll survive anymore outside.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Teeming with enemy fighters.” Page 6.</td>
<td>My best friend was in Afghanistan and he would tell me about the scary moments that were referred to in the article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He spent days at home in his wheelchair with the drapes drawn.” Page 7.</td>
<td>The news talks a lot about post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the effects that it has on those that have fought in the war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“They keep dogs clean, fed, and in good working condition-in a way similar to how they would clean and care for a weapon or a jet.”</td>
<td>I can connect to this because my dog is a prized possession in my life. I’ve also heard on the news and in newspaper articles of using dogs for therapy for PTSD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Connections from:** *Call of Duty, Scholastic Scope, October 2014.*
Helpful Hints for: CONNECTOR

• Text to self: How does the text relate to my own life?

• Text to text: How does the text relate to another book or article I read?

• Text to media: How does the text relate to music, movies, or t.v. shows?

• Text to world: How does the text relate to the world around me?
Illustrator (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)
Capture a scene or situation that occurred in the reading. Try and pick a scene or situation that occurred in the reading that was a major event. Your illustration should be neatly drawn and fully colored.
Illustrator (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)
Capture a scene or situation that occurred in the reading. Try and pick a scene or situation that occurred in the reading that was a major event. Your illustration should be neatly drawn and fully colored.

Illustration from: The Teen Who Woke Up Her School, Scholastic Choices, September, 2014.
Helpful Hints for:

**Illustrator**

Teachers can help by not grading the drawing but the thought process behind the drawing. Does it summarize the main idea of the text?

Allow students to...

- Draw
- Use Clipart
- Use Magazine clippings
- Work in partners
# Character Captain (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Main/Min Character</th>
<th>Why is the character important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Character Captain (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Main/Minor Character</th>
<th>Why is the character important?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jilly Dos Santos</td>
<td>• Determined&lt;br&gt;• Perseverance&lt;br&gt;• Brave&lt;br&gt;• Thoughtful</td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>Jilly began a petition for her school to being later to promote student success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arne Duncan</td>
<td>• Supportive&lt;br&gt;• Educated&lt;br&gt;• Respected</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>U.S. Secretary of Education that sent out twitter updates to support late starts for schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Helene A. Emsellem</td>
<td>• Intelligent&lt;br&gt;• Focused&lt;br&gt;• Persuasive</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Author of the book <em>Snooze...or Loose!</em> That is in support of late starts for students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board</td>
<td>• Thoughtful&lt;br&gt;• Educated&lt;br&gt;• Trusting</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>After listening to Jilly’s argument, the school board decided to give students a later start time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Character Captain Text:** *The Teen Who Woke Up Her School*, Scholastic Choices, September, 2014.
Summarizer (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)
Your job is to remind the group of the assigned reading by discussing the key events of the reading. You will have to list the main events—then create paragraphs of the events. You should have at least five sentences in each paragraph.

Five Main Events:
1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Summary of the Events:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Summarizer (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

Your job is to remind the group of the assigned reading by discussing the key events of the reading. You will have to list the main events—then create paragraphs of the events. You should have at least five sentences in each paragraph.

Five Main Events:

1. Sandra never knew her family other than her mom when she was young.

2. Life was tough. Her mom was really mean and neglected Sandra.

3. Sandra’s mom was reported to child protective services and Sandra was put into foster care.

4. Sandra was moved around to a lot of different foster cares.

5. On her 17th birthday, Sandra was taken out to her first dinner by her final foster care family.

Summary of the Events:

When Sandra was growing up, she didn’t know her family because her mom kept them from her. Her life was difficult. Her mom was very mean to her and she neglected Sandra. Sandra’s mom was reported to child protective services and Sandra had to go into foster care. None of the foster care families wanted to keep Sandra so she was really sad and didn’t feel like she was cared about. On Sandra’s 17th birthday, she was taken out to dinner for her birthday. This was the first time that Sandra had ever been taken out to dinner. The people that took Sandra out to dinner ended up being Sandra’s final foster care family. They cared for Sandra and taught her what happiness is. Sandra now loves sharing her story with other teens that feel hurt by their parents leaving. Her message that she shares with young teens is that life will always get better, it may take time, but you must have patience.

Summarizer from: Different Like Me, Scholastic Choices, September 2014
### Word Wizard (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interesting/Confusing Word</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
<th>What I Think it Means:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Word Wizard (Adapted from Daniels, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interesting/Confusing Word</th>
<th>Page Number</th>
<th>What I Think it Means:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diphtheria</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Medicine for a deadly disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serum</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Breakable container filled with medicine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outpost</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>On the edge of a trail where people can warm up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epidemic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>When an important announcement is made through the newspaper and radio across the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Land sticking out into the ocean.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Word Wizard Text:** *The Race Against Death*, Scholastic Scope, September 2013
Helpful Hints for:
**Word Wizard**

**Help students pick…**

- Words that make you wonder their meaning
- A new word that sounds neat!
- You’ve found your favorite word!
- Power words—words that make the text more powerful!

**Reminder:** Students do not need to have the correct definitions—the conversations with their peers will help correct incorrect definitions.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Official Sticky-Notes Bookmark</th>
<th>What’s Up with the Sticky Notes?</th>
<th>This Part of the Book (Text) Made Me...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By ____________________________</td>
<td>Since you chose this book, the hard part probably won’t be reading it. The hard part will be stopping! But...</td>
<td>When writers decide to publish their work, they want to have an impact on their readers. As you read, think about what that part of the book is making you do as a reader. Then, write that word on your sticky note so that you can come back to it later in your dailies or in your lit. circle discussion or both. Here are some prompts you can choose from:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read to p. ________</td>
<td>You’d agreed to talk about it! So you need to stop every so often and think about the parts that will help you remember what you think is important. And...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By ____________________________</td>
<td>That’s where the sticky notes come in. They let</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read to p. ________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By ____________________________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>read to p. ________</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
you mark the parts you’d like to talk about in literature circles without slowing down your reading too much.

Here's how to use them:

1. when you come to a part that you’d like to talk about in lit. circle, peel off a sticky note to mark the page.
2. Use the reminder in the next column to help you decide what

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THINK about something I hadn’t thought about before</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLINK because you saw the world through the eyes of someone who is different from me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WONDER why an event happened or a character felt a certain way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FELT UNDERSTOOD because I could relate to a character or event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAUGH because something was really funny :)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Then write down a short reminder for yourself directly on the sticky note. When you get back to lit. circle, you’ll use your sticky notes to help you decide what to talk about. That’s all there is to it!

| CRY because something was really sad |
| CONFUSED but I just didn’t understand what or why or how something could happen the way it did in the book |
| NERVOUS because it challenged my way of thinking about something |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Official Sticky-Notes Bookmark</th>
<th>Sticky Notes</th>
<th>This Part of the Book (Text) Made Me...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By <strong>Monday</strong> read to p. <strong>45.</strong></td>
<td>“I think there should be a rule that everyone in the world should get a standing ovation at least once in their lives.”</td>
<td>THINK about something I hadn’t thought about before: It’s important for everyone in the world to feel proud for an accomplishment they make. People need a standing ovation most when they’re life seems challenging. How can we help others feel this sense of pride?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By <strong>Tuesday</strong> read to p. <strong>59.</strong></td>
<td>“Here’s what I think: the only reason I’m not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way.”</td>
<td>CRY because something was really sad: It makes me feel sad that other people’s opinions about people can change their lives for the worse and affect someone’s self-esteem so...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>much.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


**Bookmark Text:** *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio
## Dailies Form for Middle School Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sticky Notes</th>
<th>Responses to My Sticky Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Put your sticky notes here.</strong></td>
<td>This part of the book made me…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(You can stack them if you need to.)</td>
<td>(circle one of more of the words below OR fill in the blank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>think blink wonder feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>understood laugh cry confused nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And here’s why:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### METATALK:

1. **Talk about your talk.** What controversial subjects did you talk about in your literature circle today? List them below.

   ___________________   ___________________   ___________________

2. **Circle the most important topic.** Why is it most important?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOW MY GROUP DID</th>
<th>HOW I DID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Describe how YOUR group effectively participated in the discussion)</td>
<td>(Describe how <strong>YOU</strong> effectively participated in the discussion)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT MY GROUP NEEDS TO DO NEXT TIME</th>
<th>WHAT I NEED TO DO NEXT TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Describe what YOUR GROUP could do to make your conversation more effective)</td>
<td>(Describe what <strong>YOU</strong> could do to make your conversation more effective)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dailies Form for Middle School Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sticky Notes</th>
<th>Responses to My Sticky Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Put your sticky notes here.</strong></td>
<td><strong>This part of the book made me...</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The lack of money, Teddy knew, kept thousands and thousands of inner-city kids like Micah from getting the educational services they needed.”</td>
<td><strong>nervous</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>And here’s why:</strong> With the challenges that kids face that place them in situations that require probation officers like Micah—how do people make sure they don’t get in the same trouble again? How do the kids stay caught up in their classes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**METATALK:**
1. Talk about your talk. **What controversial subjects did you talk about in your literature circle today? List them below.**
   - Education, equity vs. equality, anger
2. Circle the most important topic. **Why is it most important?**
   - Anger was the most important topic because we thought most of the kids in the story feel angry. This could be why they keep acting the way that they do. We also felt angry reading this part of the book because it doesn’t seem fair for kids to never get a second chance. It feels like they’re set up for continued failure.
**HOW MY GROUP DID**
My group did a really good job of talking about three major points in our discussion. There were three ideas (education, equity vs. equality, anger) that we talked about after reading this section of *Homeboyz*.

**HOW I DID**
I helped my group think more about kids that always end up meeting with their probation officers again. I helped my group talk about why this might happen over and over again.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT MY GROUP NEEDS TO DO NEXT TIME</th>
<th>WHAT I NEED TO DO NEXT TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our group needs to work on taking turns when talking so it isn’t the same person every time. One member always talked and we all didn’t get a chance to talk during the discussion.</td>
<td>I need to help lead my group when there is silence because people don’t know what to say.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Dailies Text: Homeboyz, Alan Lawrence Sitomer**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Double Entry Journal Plus</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passage or Article Title:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage, quote, statistic, opinion that YOU find compelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary from discussion:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Gallagher, 2009, p. 115)
**Double Entry Journal Plus**

**Passage or Article Title:** *Listen up: To protect your hearing, it’s best to limit loudness*
By Carla Meyer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage, quote, statistic, opinion that YOU find compelling</th>
<th>YOUR response to the writing on the left.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“The louder you like to listen to music, the shorter amount of time you should listen to it, it doesn’t matter if you are 15 or 60.”</td>
<td>It’s surprising to me that everyone has to be very careful about how loud they listen to music. I always thought older people just liked quiet music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earbuds are slightly more dangerous than over-the-ear earphones.</td>
<td>This makes me worried because I only like earbuds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“if your body is vibrating, then so is your ear”</td>
<td>It’s important to know that when I’m at concerts that I need to be careful to protect my ears and not just enjoy the environment and loud music.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I imagine that when these teens are middle-aged, we definitely will see a lot more of them needing hearing aids.”</td>
<td>I like to listen to my music loud when I am running and working out. The idea that I may need a hearing aid because of this will make me re-think how loud I listen to my music!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary from discussion: My group was very alarmed at the facts that were presented in the article. None of us knew how dangerous listening to loud music was. Some of the group members thought they could listen to music loud if it wasn’t through headphones but they were surprised it’s the same amount of damage. We would like to revisit this article after we talk to our friends and family to see how loud they all listen to music and their opinions about loud music. We predict that our friends will listen to music louder than the adults.

(Adapted from Gallagher, 2009, p. 115)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Questions</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Definition Question:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is happening?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is going on?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Consequence Question:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why does it matter?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What difference does it make?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Why should I care?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Action Question</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How can we get involved?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How can we help?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What can we do about it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Harvey and Daniels, 2011, p. 90
| **Critical Questions** | **Text** | **Listen up: To protect your hearing, it’s best to limit loudness**  
By Carla Meyer |
|-----------------------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **The Definition Question:**  
- What is it?  
- What is happening?  
- What is going on? | Teens are hurting their hearing by listening to music from 80-100% too many minutes and hours a day. |
| **The Consequence Question:**  
- Why does it matter?  
- What difference does it make?  
- Why should I care? | This article matters because a lot of teens do not know the damage they are causing to their hearing while listening to their headphones all the time through their technology. |
| **The Action Question**  
- How can we get involved?  
- How can we help?  
- What can we do about it? | We can complete a service learning project to show our friends the affects that loud music has on their hearing. We can provide statistics and show our friends how loud their music should be through headphones. |

Adapted from Harvey and Daniels, 2011, p. 90
Visual interpretations

(Adapted from O’Donnell-Alen, 2011, p 74)
Visual interpretations

The article describes the impact that loud music has on hearing. One in five teenagers has hearing loss due to loud music. The article described that earbuds are more dangerous than over-the-ear headphones because they are closer to the inner ear. The article suggests that teens listen to music at a softer volume and for short periods of time. The article also recommends that teens use noise cancelling earplugs if they attend concerts to prevent any extra hearing loss that may occur.

Visual Interpretation Text: *Listen up: To protect your hearing, it’s best to limit loudness*

By Carla Meyer
APPENDIX J

FORMATIVE RUBRICS
APPENDIX J:
FORMATIVE AND SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

We must be practical about our assessment and evaluation of student work in literature circles. Assessment is something that we do all day in our classrooms. Gallagher (2009), O’Donnell-Allen (2011), Harvey and Daniels (2009) review that grading is something that we do once and a while in our classroom. As we formatively assess our students, we use the data that is collected to shape our instruction. When we summatively assess students, we are not using the data to enhance instruction, but to report to others outside of our classroom how our students are performing.

To grade assignments at our building, we use a point scale of zero to eight based off of International Baccalaureate® (IB) Middle Years Programme (MYP) Rubrics (2014). If a student scores a zero, the student either did not attempt the assignments or does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given on a rubric. As students progress throughout the point scale, the teacher evaluates the student’s knowledge and skills on content. Students that score a seven or an eight are performing above grade level standards.

Each IB subject area has distinct rubrics that are utilized for class assessments. Below are the general rubrics for each class and skill through literature circles. The rubrics were developed based on the interim rubrics provided by International Baccalaureate Organization (2014) in the Content Subject Guides. Please note that these rubrics may be modified to specifically meet the needs of the subject assessment.
### Formative Rubric-Knowledge and Skill: Adapted from IBMYP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>The student demonstrates very limited understanding of the topic or theme. The work lacks detail, development and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>The student demonstrates a sufficient understanding of the relevant aspects of the topic or theme. The work displays adequate detail, development and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>The student demonstrates a good understanding of the relevant aspects of the topic or theme. The work displays substantial detail, development and support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>The student demonstrates a strong understanding of the relevant aspects of the topic or theme. The work consistently displays illustrative detail, development and support.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Formative Rubric - Organization: Adapted from IBMYP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>The student’s work is generally disorganized and confused, and arguments are not presented in a logical manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>The student’s work is basically organized, clear and coherent, and arguments are presented in a logical manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>The student’s work is usually well organized, clear and coherent, and arguments are presented in a thoughtful, logical manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>The student’s work is consistently well organized, clear and coherent, and arguments are presented in a perceptive and persuasive manner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Formative Rubric-Language and Mechanics: Adapted from IBMYP 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Achievement</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Very frequent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>Frequent errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>Rare errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Only occasional errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX K

SUMMATIVE RUBRICS
### Summative Rubric - Knowledge: Adapted from IBMYP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

| 1–2               | - The use of vocabulary is incorrect or not attempted  
|                   | - Facts and examples are either absent, or those used do not show understanding.  
|                   | - The student provides descriptions that are inaccurate; explanations are absent. |

**Comments:**

| 3–4               | - The use of vocabulary is mostly accurate, though some errors remain.  
|                   | - Facts and examples are used and show basic understanding.  
|                   | - The student provides basic descriptions that may need more detail; explanations are absent. |

**Comments:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5–6   | - Vocabulary is used accurately.  
|       | - Related facts are used to show understanding.  
|       | - The student provides accurate descriptions but they are  
|       |   lacking details and explanations.  |

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7-8   | - The student shows an excellent usage and range of content  
|       |   vocabulary.  
|       | - A range of related facts and examples are used to show  
|       |   understanding.  
|       | - Descriptions are accurate, detailed and explained.  |

**Comments:**
## Summative Rubric-Concepts: Adapted from IBMYP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1–2               | - Use of concepts is inappropriate.  
                   - The student may show some understanding by attempting to connect some concepts to the subject matter but is unsuccessful |
| **Comments:**     |            |
| 3–4               | - Use of concepts is attempted but not appropriate.  
                   - The student demonstrates understanding of concepts by making some basic connections to the subject matter. |
| **Comments:**     |            |
| 5–6               | - Use of concepts is present but not always appropriate.  
                   - The student demonstrates an understanding of concepts by describing connections to the subject matter but lacks detail. |
| 7-8 | • The student attempts to apply concepts to the provided situation but is not always successful.  

Comments:  

7-8 | • Use of concepts is appropriate and advanced.  
• The student demonstrates an understanding of concepts by explaining in detail connections to the subject matter.  
• The student correctly applies concepts to the provided situation all of the time.  

Comments:
## Summative Rubric-Skills: Adapted from IBMYP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1–2               | • The student can select and use information but it is not related.  
                     • The student displays no critical thinking.  
                     • The student’s arguments, decisions or judgments are not always related, or may be absent.  
                     • The student attempts to carry out investigations, demonstrating few skills. |

**Comments:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3–4               | • The student selects and uses some related information.  
                     • The student’s work lacks critical thinking.  
                     • The student makes some arguments, decisions or judgments though these are unsupported.  
                     • The student demonstrates basic investigative skills. |

**Comments:**
| 5–6 | - The student selects and uses mostly related information.  
- Work shows limited critical thinking  
- The student makes some arguments, decisions or judgments and some are supported.  
- The student demonstrates adequate investigative skills |

**Comments:**

| 7–8 | - The student selects and uses a range of related information.  
- Work shows a good level critical thinking.  
- All arguments, decisions and judgments are supported.  
- The student demonstrates good investigative skills. |

**Comments:**
### Summative Rubric - Organization and Presentation: Adapted from IBMYP 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement Level</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors given below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1–2               | - The student communicates information that may not always be on the topic.  
                   - The student attempts to structure and sequence the work, but it may be unorganized and/or in the unsatisfactory format.  
                   - Presentation and expression are unclear and no attention paid to the audience. |
| **Comments:**     |            |
| 3–4               | - The student communicates information that is sometimes on topic.  
                   - The student attempts to structure and order the work in an organized format but is not always successful.  
                   - Presentation and expression are occasionally unclear with little attention paid to the audience. |
<p>| <strong>Comments:</strong>     |            |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5–6   | - The student communicates information that is mostly on topic.  
      | - The student organizes information into a sequence, appropriate to the format required.  
      | - Presentation and expression are clear and attention is paid to the audience in terms of appropriate language, style and visual representation. |
|       | **Comments:** |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 7-8   | - The student communicates information that is always on the topic.  
      | - The student organizes information into a logical sequence, appropriate to the format required.  
      | - Presentation and expression are clear, and effective, and the language, style and visual representation used are always appropriate to the audience and purpose. |
|       | **Comments:** |
REFERENCES


