A Field Guide to Literature Circles in the 7–12 Classroom

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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Abstract:

Last semester I created a unit plan in which I utilized literature circles. While I turned it in and received a good grade, I found myself wondering: how would this unit plan work in an actual classroom? As a current student of teaching, I am constantly trying to collect new tools for my teaching toolbox. My professors are always encouraging me to gather as many creative and useful ideas as possible, and so I used this thesis as an opportunity to capitalize on that idea. I compiled this field guide to literature circles to not only educate myself on the topic, but to hopefully help spur others to use literature circles in their own classroom. Literature circles are small, organized groups of students reading the same piece of literature. Literature circles are a powerful way to incorporate collaboration, critical thinking, and reading into one event. With the right amount of planning, literature circles can be a successful and enjoyable experience for both teachers and students.

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Research
As a Ball State University student I wanted to “keep up” with the current teaching literature trends, so I often incorporated literature circles into my own lesson plans. After a few of these lesson plans, I realized that I did not truly understand how they worked in an actual classroom. While in college, professors ask us to create lesson plans for students we will have someday. I often found myself wondering whether or not what I had envisioned on paper would really work in a classroom today. I decided that if I were to implement Literature Circles into my own classroom when I became a teacher, it would be a good idea to learn more about them before I actually try them out.

So how can a beginning teacher, like myself, or a teacher new to the idea, learn more about Literature Circles? I have completed hours of research, studying, and analyzing to compile this field guide to help answer that question. Although I cannot say that this field guide will answer all of your literature circle questions, I can say with confidence that this field guide shall serve as a tangible starting point for your own literature circle education. My goal is to create a concrete compilation of information on literature circles that students of teaching, parents, or
anyone who wishes to learn more about literature circles can use as a resource, or teachers in the field can use to integrate literature circles into their classroom.

According to an article by Harvey Daniels, Literature Circles began “back in the early 1980s, [when] a number of teachers and students around the country simultaneously and independently invented the idea” (10). It was then that “pioneers like Becky Abraham Searle in Chicago and Karen Smith in Arizona began organizing their students into small, peer-led book discussion groups” (10). It was not until 1994, however, that Daniels published the first book on the topic, Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom. Regardless of when they originated, literature circles were founded because people realized the need to engage students with literature. So why literature circles?

Many researchers have seen the importance of social interaction in student development. Jean Piaget and Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, two major influences in the psychology and education fields, “emphasize the importance of social interactions in cognitive development” (Woolfolk 40). Specifically, “Piaget believed that the most helpful interactions were those
between peers because peers are on an equal basis and can challenge each other's thinking” (Woolfolk 40–41). Vygotsky believed “that our specific mental structures and processes can be traced to our interactions with others,” and “these social interactions are more than simple influences of cognitive development, [since] they actually create our cognitive structures and thinking processes” (Woolfolk 39). Literature circles, then, are a creative and practical tool to promote cognitive development.

Piaget believed learning was a constructive process. It is important, then, to make sure that students are actively engaged in the learning process. Piaget claims that a student cannot just look at something and make it knowledge. Rather, to make something knowledge, a student must act on the something: modify, question, transform, understand processes, and consequences. Furthermore, students should interact with both their teachers and peers “in order to test their thinking, to be challenged, to receive feedback, and to watch how others work out problems” (47). Literature Circles are an excellent opportunity for students to “act on, manipulate, observe, then talk and/or write about what they have experienced” (47) while reading literature. Reading is the basis for
knowledge, but Literature Circles are the "concrete experiences [that can] provide the raw materials for thinking" (47). Piaget would say that "communicating with others makes students use, test, and sometimes change their thinking abilities" (47) thus promoting cognitive development. Although literature circles were not around when Piaget and Vygotsky were developing their theories, it is easy to see how their theories could be supported by literature circles today.

Since Piaget and Vygotsky, however, many educators have sensed this need for social interaction in the classroom to promote learning. Sandra Okura DaLie, a high school teacher from Los Angeles, designates her "most important revelation" as "the realization that learning must be student centered, [and that] students, not the teacher, must be at the heart of the learning process, not passive recipients" (84). While some teachers and professionals may argue that literature circles have the potential to be unorganized, DaLie counters that "learning is not neat and tidy, [or] regimented by straight rows, silence, or wrong or right answers" (84). Since teachers and professionals understand that students need to be active participants in their own education, cognitive development, and
learning process, then students need to have “the opportunity and the freedom to talk, challenge, experiment, and collaborate” (84). DaLie concludes that “genuine learning is, therefore, a bit messy, unquestionably noisy, often surprising, and always rewarding to observe” (84). Literature circles have the ability to foster interaction and collaboration in an environment “too often [obsessed with] competition and individualism” (Hill, Johnson, and Noe 7).

So now that we know a little bit of the rationale for using Literature Circles in the classroom, who are they for? What I found in my research is that anyone can utilize Literature Circles. Although in 1994 Harvey Daniels originally defined Literature Circles as being “essentially [...] small, temporary discussion groups composed of students who are reading the same story, poem, article, or book” (Blum 100), since then Literature Circles have evolved and become more detailed. Any teacher of any grade level in any content area can find ways to incorporate literature circles into their curriculum. Part of the reason this is possible is because educators across the board are realizing the importance that theorists – such as Vygotsky and Piaget – argued for collaboration in the classroom, while
more and more curricula today are focusing on creating student-centered classrooms. Moreover, "the concept of literacy in today's world is changing" (Cavanaugh 3). Semali argues "this new concept of literacy goes beyond only paper to include reading from computer screens and personal devices to include media, technology, information, and other critical literacies" (3). Thus, we now need to include many new forms of information and technology into our current realm of literacy; these can include, but are not limited to: word processors, e-mail, the internet, blogs, web editors, graphic artwork, MP3's, etc. As the definition of literacy broadens, so too does the opportunity for application of literature circles in any classroom.
Types of Literature Circles
There are many different types of Literature Circles that can be implemented in the classroom. Students can read the same book in several different groups, or students can read different books on the same topic in their groups. For example, an entire eighth grade class could begin their fall semester with a unit on friendship. The class could read Jerry Spinelli’s *Stargirl* in groups of four or five, or they could rank four different books on friendship: *Storky: How I Lost My Nickname and Won the Girl, Walking Naked, Never Mind!: A Twin Novel, or Stargirl*. I could then divide the class into four groups, with each group reading one of those novels.

With the first scenario, when all students are reading *Stargirl*, as the teacher I have several decisions I can make. First of all, I can split the class up randomly, by personal interests, by ability, or by deliberately mixing abilities. With the second scenario, when I allow students to rank their novel choices, I am letting my students feel they are in the driver’s seat of choosing their novel. By having them rank, though, I am also giving myself the ultimate final decision since I will still be forming the groups. If I feel Johnny and Kyle should not work together and they both
ranked *Never Mind!: A Twin Novel* as number one, I can give one of those students their second choice. I can most likely do this without causing much commotion, too. I do not have to explain that I did not want the two boys in the same group. Instead, I can explain that mathematically this is just how the groups worked out. Of course, I can always choose to simply assign students in the groups I wish. I could choose four books with varying reading levels and group students accordingly. Or, I can choose books with similar reading levels and groups can be arranged so all types of learners are in each group.

No matter how the grouping is done, it is important to remember that “to maximize students’ experience, it is probably a good idea to use a variety of criteria” (Marzano 89). More about grouping students can be found in the How Section of this field guide.

Aside from deciding how I wish to group students, I also have to decide when to actually utilize literature circles. Sometimes it may be practical to use literature circles every day for a week, and other times to do them every Friday for x number of weeks. Then, of course, the teacher may choose something in between: every other day, only two
days a week, etc. As with all teaching strategies, though, it is important to know when to utilize literature circles. Literature circles can lose their effectiveness if used everyday. It is important, then, to use literature circles for their benefits, not as a crutch or because an educator lacks other ideas. Also, this tool work best when supplemented and integrated with teacher instruction. If the teacher notices groups struggling with character development when walking around during Monday's meeting, a mini lesson on the topic can be implemented on Tuesday. Literature circles are not an escape for teachers; teachers cannot simply sit back and hope their students will figure the logistics of group work and the nuances of literature circles out. As with other teaching strategies, it is imperative to anticipate the best opportunities to employ literature circles into the curriculum.
How?
How will a literature circle look in a real classroom? While all classes have their own individuality, there are some elements that will appear in all literature circle classrooms. For example, all teachers have to face similar decisions, such as which content to use, which book(s) to use, how to group students, how to introduce the literature circle, and how to assess and evaluate students. In order to implement literature circles all teachers will also have to first teach their students how to participate in a literature circle.

The first big decision a teacher makes is the content. The teacher might choose to use a literature circle to teach either a specific novel or a general concept that is required by the school’s curriculum. For example, a ninth grade teacher required to teach *To Kill a Mockingbird* can have separate groups reading the same novel. An American Literature teacher required to cover colonialism can have groups reading four or five different books on the topic. Teachers do not have to limit themselves to novels for literature circles. They can use articles, short stories, poems, websites, or any other type of text.
Even if the teacher has already chosen the content (for example, friendship), and decided they want students to read a novel, the book(s) to be read still need to be chosen. Although there is no perfect formula for deciding on novels, "Teachers tend to concur that the better the book, the more gripping its plot, the more gray its choices, the more ethical dilemmas pull the reader in, the richer the resultant talk will be" (Wood, Roser, and Martinez 107). Teachers have their hands full when they are choosing a book(s). Besides choosing a book that will engage students, teachers need to consider students' reading abilities. A teacher can choose to arrange students in groups according to interest, random placement, or ability. To choose any of the options, though, teachers need to consider the book(s). The teacher might wish to select the book before he/she puts too much thought into how to organize the class.

Availability of books is another factor to consider when making book selections. Sometimes using books that the school already has purchased is the only option. Sometimes if several teachers can collaborate together to ask to purchase a novel, the school can help with funding. On occasion, teachers ask the school to pay for x% of the new novels while three or four
English teachers put their extra "classroom budget" (and in some cases, some of their own pocket money) together to cover the rest of the books' cost. During scenarios like these, rotating bins can be used. For example, all the junior year English teachers could work out a schedule for using the books in each individual classroom. This would, of course, require there to be great communication and planning between the different teachers.

Another option could be to use some of the classroom money to purchase used books on Amazon.com or Half.com or used bookstores. Each situation will be different, but there are definitely numerous ways to solve the book(s) issue.

Once the content and/or material to read is decided, the next decision is how to place students into groups. Group work can be seen as "too easy" for students since they help each other to achieve the same goal. However, if structured carefully and correctly, group work can be incredibly beneficial for all students involved:

"In the world of horse racing, it is called 'ponying' when one horse practices with another to provide a steadying support before reaching the gate. In the
maritime world, it is called 'tugging' when one boat serves as a guide for a vessel leaving or approaching a port. Within the academic world, it is called 'grouping' or 'cooperating' when one student shares expertise with another as they undertake an academic task or work together to complete an assignment.” (Wood, Roser, and Martinez 102)

Deciding how to divide up students can be a time-consuming task. First of all, the size of the groups need to be determined: “Group size should be large enough to ensure diversity of ideas” (Gambrell and Almasi 33). A literature circle of only two or three students does not offer as many opportunities for different points of view or diversity as a larger group can offer. However, the literature circle size should be arranged “so that the size of the group does not interfere with the readers’ opportunities to become increasingly adept at expressing interpretations of texts and responding to the contributions of others and thoughtful, respectful, and probing ways” (Blum, Lipsett, and Yocum 100). A group
larger than six or seven, then, does not allow each student as much time to
share their own ideas or invest in the literature circle as much.

No matter how the students are grouped, it is imperative that
flexible grouping is considered. If the groups are set up according to
ability, for example, the students’ abilities need to be assessed before each
time groups are formed. So if Johnny is a “struggling” student in
September, it would be wrong to assume that Johnny is a “struggling”
student in March. While sometimes that might be the case, it is not fair to
Johnny to assume that his abilities have not changed. The same goes for a
student who is “advanced,” since a student in the “advanced” group for
poetry might really struggle with Shakespeare or a science-fiction novel.
Different students may both struggle and excel with different topics
throughout the year. It is most beneficial, then, to reevaluate students
before each ability group placement. It is also important if you frequently
use literature circles in the classroom to not always use one type of
grouping. Mixing up the groups helps create a stronger classroom
community and allows students to take on different roles. If students are
consistently placed in the same groups more than likely, the same students
will assume the leadership and follower roles. More about the different roles students will play in literature circles can be found in the Roles Section. Also, literature circles do not have to be permanent: “Group membership may rotate for various chapters of the book or a group may remain together until the book’s completion” (Gambrell and Almasi 185).

After the teacher has decided the content and group details, it is time to begin thinking about how to introduce literature circles into the classroom. In an ideal situation a solid classroom community would already be in place. But if this is not the case, then now would be the time to implement a few activities and set the groundwork to build classroom community. For example, establishing ground rules, as Whitin suggests, is a good place to start. In her classroom, there are “no put-downs; a rule that includes both verbal and nonverbal behavior. [Since] Lack of tolerance for one another not only hurts us as people, but it also limits our learning” (444). Gambrell and Almasi suggest creating “Looks Like/Sounds Like/Feels Like” charts as a class. Students can either individually, in a group, or as a whole class create this chart which defines good group
work. Here, students will decide what is and is not acceptable in the literature circle environment (184).

Next, the teacher can begin to get into the details of the literature circle process. Wilhelm reminds teachers to keep in mind "what kinds of attitudes, knowledge, and processes [that] students need to bring to a text to be successful with it. There needs to be a sense of purpose and motivation, for starters. There also needs to be knowledge of content (we can only learn about something we already know something about), and there should be knowledge of the necessary processes – in other words, knowledge of the particular genre and the processes this text type expects us to use as readers" (95). Wilhelm brings up an excellent point: students will not all immediately understand literature circles. The same way teachers teach students how to succeed in their classes by providing students with a schedule, rules, regulations, grade explanations via a syllabus, teachers need to teach students how to succeed during literature circles.

If students choose which novel they are reading, it is a good idea to give students information about the different options they have. This way,
students can decide which book they are interested based on other criteria besides the title of the novel. The teacher can use the summaries on the back of the book, quotes from websites about the story, reviews from Amazon.com, or even excerpts from the actual novel. Also, it is very important to “share information about any objectionable material in the books, so students with sensibilities towards cursing, sex, violence, etc. [can] make an educated decision” (Tish 33).

After students are arranged in groups and made aware of what specific text they will be reading, they can be taught specifically how to participate in a literature circle. Sometimes it can take students “two or three months to learn to really talk together during book discussions” (Wood, Roser, and Martinez 105). One good way to teach students the necessary skills, then, is to begin

“by reading aloud to the entire class, all the while sharing some of your own responses and musings, inviting contributions, and encouraging connections between text and everyday experiences. This portion of the experience serves as a model to show the
students what is involved in literature circle discussion
and what they will be doing when they discuss on
their own.” (Wood, Roser, Martinez 105)

Just as modeling how to work out example math problems before
assigning problems, or modeling how to diagram a sentence before having
students finish a worksheet is one of the best ways to help students
understand a process, modeling how to participate in a literature circle is
one of the best ways to show students what is expected of them. The
teacher will need to “model effective discussion skills such as listening,
questioning, responding, and referring to the text for examples and
clarification” (Gambrell and Almasi 186).

Questioning is a skill, however, that most students will need more
than just modeling to fully understand. Questioning is one of the most
important skills needed to successfully participate in literature circle
discussions. It is necessary, therefore, to teach students how to question.

One good exercise to teach questioning is to examine and discuss
both good and bad questions. An example of how to do this is to use
“questioning circles.” The questioning circle “consists of three overlapping
areas of knowledge” that “represent the text being read (matter), the
reader (personal reality), and the world and/or other literature (external
reality)” (Wilhelm 134). Teachers can pass out diagrams of these
questioning circles and create activities utilizing them.

Another questioning tool is George Hillocks’s (1980) “questioning
hierarchy” (Wilhelm 129). This questioning scheme forces students to
realize that they “need to answer textual questions of one kind before they
can answer textual questions of the next kind; one kind of understanding
is the foundation for the next kind” (Wilhelm 129). Teachers can make
worksheets with examples of the seven levels of questions before asking
students to generate their own questions. The seven levels are:

1. Basic Stated Information

2. Key Details

3. Stated Relationships

4. Simple Implied Relationships

5. Complex Implied Relationships

6. Author’s Generalization

7. Structural Generalizations (Wilhelm 129-30).
It is not as important which route is used to teach questioning, but rather *that* questioning is taught. Since questioning is such a crucial part of literature circles, it makes sense to spend time teaching students *how* to do it properly. The success of individual literature circles rests in the actual group discussions. It is also important not to limit students’ questioning, though. For example, one group of teachers first “thought it was important to get kids to ask the kinds of questions [they] thought were profound or would elicit critical thinking. [They] have come to understand that children will ask about whatever they think is interesting, bewildering, or peculiar. Furthermore, [they] believe that student questioning will become commonplace when teachers trust their students’ natural inquisitiveness and seek ways to encourage and support their ability to articulate and write questions” (Gambrell and Almasi 75). Therefore it is important to remember that “like any other important literacy skill, questioning and discussion should be taught in order that students might continue to outgrow their own present abilities” (Wilhelm 151).
Roles
Although students will be taking on more responsibilities during literature circles, that does not mean teachers will be taking on less. Besides choosing content, organizing groups, and setting the framework, teachers will take on many other tasks during literature circles. Each classroom situation will be different, but Terrence Cavanaugh outlines a general list for teachers to do during each literature circle event:

1. Assist students in joining literature circles (discussion groups).

2. Assign roles for the members of each circle.

3. Assign reading to be completed by the circles inside or outside of class.

4. Select circle meeting days – daily, weekly, biweekly, for example.

5. Meet with each group, or mingle among the groups, to check on their progress and help keep students on task.

6. Help students prepare for their roles in their circle; for example, have students read their role descriptions aloud without giving answers.
7. Act as a facilitator for the circles, for example, teachers can ask students to summarize the reading or discuss aspects of their roles.

8. Assess the student work. (12–13)

The important focus from this list is that the teachers are to “act as facilitators and models for student self-reflection, inquiry, and critical thinking” (Hill, Johnson, and Now 10). Teachers can “encourage independence [...] by stepping back and taking a less dominant role than in the past” (10). For years, it was common that the teacher should act as the guide and possessor of answers to all literature discussions. Now, however, it is being proven that this attitude “may suppress critical inquiry and individual response” in students (10). A major problem with focusing on the teacher as the holder of the “right” answers is that “students’ voices are lost as they come to believe that ‘truth only comes from others’” (10). So, in truth, in stepping back a little and redefining the role of a teacher during literature circle activities can help teach children how to think more critically and to grow more as intellectual beings.
Assigning students roles helps create structure in the literature circle experience. Lyn Hay and Kylie Hanson interviewed users of the literature circle roles and found that many had positive comments. One interviewee explained how roles can be a "powerful way to introduce students to approaching the reading of literature in a number of different ways" (27). The roles make her make think "outside [her] square" and they "also can assist in the development of higher order thinking skills, because you need to have evaluated, synthesized and analysed before being able to successfully articulate a response from the perspective of the particular role that you are representing" (27). Another benefit for students is the accountability it gives them when they read. Students are no longer allowed to skim through the pages or forget their book in their locker, because their circle is depending on them. Students know that they have an obligation to their group and will be more likely to read to avoid the disappointment or teasing from group members who did read.

Although it may at first seem that being assigned a role might limit a reader's insight, it can actually do just the opposite. Since roles should rotate within the group, the roles can be a way to highlight "a range of
different approaches to reading and responding to texts; it gives individuals insight into the various ways people think, and together as a collaborative group, people can ultimately 'view' a text in a far more holistic way than one person could ever achieve by themselves” (Hay and Hanson27). Bringing together all of these “different perspectives” can help “[students] broaden [their] conceptions and provide a forum that allows people to recognise, respect, value and tolerate differing views and opinions” (27).

Teachers also need to be responsible for assigning specific roles to the students in the literature circles. Teachers can either choose to assign roles based on random chance, or even rearrange the roles to accommodate different ability levels. Either way, teachers should take special care to change roles so the same student is not always the Vocabulary Master. It is important to remember that no matter what the students’ ability levels and interests are, their own diverse life experiences and personal knowledge and understanding of the world around them will lead to different responds to the same text.
There are, then, endless possibilities of roles to use in the classroom. It is often practical to invent a new role to fulfill a specific objective for a particular unit. Below are a few literature circle roles from the article, "Assign Roles to Get Literature Circles Rolling" from the December 2005 Curriculum Review:

1. Discussion Director - This role is basically the chairperson of the literature circle. The Discussion Director’s duties begin with making sure all of the members of the group are present and prepared. Then he/she usually shares a comment or two about what he/she thinks about the reading from the time before. It is the job of this person to call on which member should be speaking next.

2. Character Captain - This person explores the characters from the reading. This person focuses on both the major and minor characters. A good way to fulfill this role is to make bulleted lists of characters and their individual traits. The Character Captain can discuss how particular characters develop and change over
the course of the reading. This student might also discuss relationships between characters: who gets along, who is related to whom, who is fighting who, etc. The Character Captain should also talk about his/her personal feelings towards different characters in the reading.

3. Scene Setter - This person focuses on the setting of the story. The Scene Setter should note all of the elements of setting, such as place, time of day, week, month, year, seasons, and/or weather. This student should focus on how the scene affects the story. The Scene Setter might also want to comment on why he/she believe the author chose to use those particular scenes in that particular story.

4. Vocabulary Master – This role concentrates on the vocabulary of the reading. This student can list words that he/she thinks the members of the literature circle need to understand to better understand the story. The Vocabulary Masters record the words as he/she reads, with notes about what he/she think the words
mean. Then, later, this student can look up the definitions of these words and record those.

5. Passage Picker – This is one of the most wide open roles. The Passage Picker can choose several passages that he/she finds particularly noteworthy, either for humor, seriousness, beauty, irony, etc. Why he/she chose these particular passages needs to be explained by the Passage Picker.

6. Connector – This role requires the student to connect characters, settings, and actions to other characters, settings, or actions in other books, movies, or television shows, or in his/her own life. The Connector should compare and contrast these connections.

7. Imaginative Investigator – This role asks students to step into other content areas. The Imaginative Investigator should look into some background information on an aspect of the story. For example, if the story takes place in New York City during a specific time period, the student can research the culture or history of the city. Interesting facts, statistics, or funny stories work well here. If the story is about an athlete’s agent, the
Imaginative Investigator might research how one could become a professional athlete’s agent.

8. Artful Artist – This role asks the student to give attention to illustrating the segment. This illustration should include different parts of the segment, such as characters, setting, plot, etc. The student can choose how to create their illustration – painting, drawing, story board, collage, diorama, etc. (10).

Other roles can be created as needed. If the class is focusing on literary devices such as metaphors, similes, personifications, etc., a “Literary Device Decoder” can be assigned to locate those devices and share their meanings with the literature circle. A “Plot Plotter” can be asked to compile a list of the major events in the reading segment. He/she can add what they feel are the causes and effects of these major events, and even discuss their consequences and outcomes.

As long as the teacher gives a clear explanation of the specific roles, students can be held responsible for their duties. One way to explain this is to give out brochures at the start of the literature circle to explain the different roles (see “Miss Bernier’s Literature Circles: Literature Circle Roles..."
brochure in the *Example* section). Another option is to create bookmarks for each role. The Discussion Director can distribute a role bookmark at the end of the current literature circle meeting, so the students know what is expected of them as they read.
Benefits
Literature circles...

1. create lifelong learners.

2. validate student opinions and perspectives, and thus help build student self-esteem.

3. teach students to learn by doing.

4. allow teachers to assess many types of learning and knowledge.

5. increase student engagement.

6. provide students with choice in the classroom.

7. foster student responsibility.

8. strengthen student critical thinking.

1. Literature circles create lifelong learners.

Teachers strive to create lifelong learners. While teaching a specific novel is very critical to that one year of school, teaching students the skills to read novels next year and the year after, can be just as, if not more, powerful. Literature circles can help make reading long novels appear to
be less threatening. Having positive experiences with working in a group can help students realize that reading can be fun. Morrow and Weinstein “reported that the scope of reading increased when students and teachers participated in discussion and debate about the ideas presented in the texts they read” (Gambrell and Almasi 19). They also found that students who were able to discuss what they were reading with friends, teachers, and parents, were more active readers than other students. Therefore, “students who talk about what they read are more likely to engage in reading” (19). Just as with any other activity, if we want students to continue reading, it helps when students have positive experiences doing so. As DaLie points out, “writing book reports and taking multiple choice tests at the end of a good novel are not part of an adult’s reading experience” (98). Since modeling is such an effective way to teach students how to complete a task, why not model what an adult’s reading experience does look like? Literature circles ask students to practice authentic experiences and behaviors: “to read, think, imagine, question, laugh, and talk” (DaLie 98). Perfecting these skills can encourage students to read on their own, to continue exploring, and wish to obtain more
knowledge, rather than just memorize facts for a test and never read again once school is over. Also, reading about one topic can lead to researching about another related topic. For example, reading a poem in school about World War II can cause students to want to read about World War II, and then World War I, and then why it happened, etc. A student who enjoyed reading a World War II poem might end up reading about the psychology of world leaders two weeks later.

2. Literature circles validate student opinions and perspectives, and thus help build student self-esteem.

Literature circles can help teach students that teachers do not hold all of the “right” answers, and that they, too, have the “right” answers. Students become so accustomed to giving the answers that the teacher wants, that they forget that their opinions and perspectives matter, too. Participating in literature circles “encourage[s] the free expression of readers’ opinions, even disagreements with one another. They not only
responses. When a student contributes to the group in a successful manner and receives positive feedback, that student's self-worth is justified. The sense of accomplishment that students feel after literature circles can provide them with the self-esteem necessary to be a successful students and members of society.

3. Literature circles teach students to learn by doing.

Many students learn best by actively utilizing their new knowledge. Lecture might work for some students, visual aids might work for other students, but that still leaves out those students who learn best by doing. Literature circles allow a teacher to incorporate all three types of learners into one method. Telling and showing are the easiest approaches to use in an average classroom, but doing can be more complicated. Literature circles give teachers an effective tactic for doing so. Many theorists "such as Dewey, Rogers, and Piaget suggest that learning takes place best when children are allowed to learn by doing, taking ownership of their studies
through opportunities that lead to freedom of choice, and when social interaction abounds in the learning environment” (Stringer, Reynolds, and Simpson 70). Brabham and Villaume explain how “literature circles can serve as launching devices or scaffolds that help students generate ideas and their own thoughtful conversations about what they have read” (278). Scaffolds can propose “alternatives to independent reading and engage students as readers” (Blum, Lipsett, and Yocum 100). Technically, scaffolds “are conversations and interactions in which adults temporarily support children’s development of more complex thought and language” (101). Literature circles, though, go a step farther than simple scaffolding. They help students and teachers alike “break away from typical classroom patterns in which students respond to only the teacher’s probes” (Brabham and Villaume 279). Rather, students learn for themselves by trial and error how to invent their own probes, ways of thinking, and appropriate and successful behaviors during reading. Literature circles help students learn how to accept “responsibility for developing and discussing their own questions and interpretations for texts” and how to “launch more complex levels of thought, language, and literacy” (279). After these literature circle
experiences, students can take these new skills and apply them to other
classes, reading, and their lives in general because they have practiced
them through doing. Hopefully, they will be able to repeat the same
behaviors and have more successful reading experiences in the future.

4. Literature circles allow teachers to assess many types of learning and
knowledge.

It is well-known that there is not just one type of learning or one
type of knowledge. A classroom that only assesses one type of each, then,
is letting its students down. Just because one student cannot write a book
report with flawless grammar and syntax does not mean that student did
not grasp the purpose of or learn from the text. Conversely, just because
a student can write a book report with flawless grammar and syntax does
not mean that student grasped the purpose and learned a lot from the
text. It only makes sense, then, that teachers have ways to assess these
different types of learning and knowledge.
Literature circles provide an extremely open-ended opportunity for different types of assessment. Grades can be given by group members at the end of each literature circle that assess the level of participation each student had that meeting. Whole group projects with individual components can be implemented at the end of the literature circle unit. Students can be asked to bring questions to class for their group members and answer each other's questions. Of course, traditional tests and essays can be given during literature circles. Mini-lessons assessing specific content from the text can be implemented on off-circle days. For example, students can be asked to draw and explain their favorite scene thus far, or map the changes they see in specific characters, or create a timeline of events. Practicing all of these types of assessment gives students more opportunity to show the teacher how well they are understanding the content and growing in their own knowledge. Giving students more than one opportunity to show off their knowledge can also help increase the "safety" that they feel in the classroom, hopefully leading to risk-taking in other areas that they struggle in. For example, giving the "artist" time to draw or create gives that student the confidence that
he/she understands the material. It then gives that student help in
tackling other areas he/she may struggle in, such as writing an essay. The
student knows that he/she understands the material, and can use the
positive experiences while drawing or creating his/her new knowledge and
apply that to the essay.

5. Literature circles increase student engagement.

Students who are engaged in academic material are more likely to
learn better. First of all, engagement often means making connections
with material. When students have the opportunity to make connections
with material they are learning, they can better put that information into
their long term memory, attached to their connection. Literature circles
also offer choice to students, which appeals to them and gives them a
more positive attitude about the material, this lending them to learn better.
Also, literature circles offer smaller group atmospheres, where allow
students “more opportunities to speak, interact, interpret, clarify, and
exchange points of view that are offered in other talk structures” (Grambrell and Almasi 29). In a large class setting, some students might be more prone to dozing off, daydreaming, and/or doodling. In literature circles, students are in small groups and constantly held accountable for. They have more chances to talk, and therefore, become more engaged with the material. Gambrell and Almasi explain that “by sharing their reactions to the unusual text as well as their strategies, for handling the text, students revealed their own learning strategies, which may help them to come to new understandings about the text and themselves” (21).

Students are more interested in the topics since they have personal investment in them. When the classroom environment provides “opportunities for authentic discussion, students’ perspectives of the literary process, as well as their literary competence are affected in ways that reflect that [environment]” (21). Students can share with each other how they deal with reading, their roles, and their own understandings. Literature circles provide students with more small-group opportunities. Many students feel uncomfortable sharing ideas with an entire class, and may clam up in the classroom because of that. “In a peer-led group of four
or five,” however, “each student gets much more ‘airtime’ and feels less risk than in a whole-class discussion” (Daniels 11). Students will, hopefully, become more engaged with the material as it appears less and less threatening to them, and more enjoyable.

6. Literature circles provide students with choice in the classroom.

So often, school requires students to sit in rows and conform to what the class as a whole is doing. Students answer teacher questions, read teacher material, and often learn what the teacher has asked them to learn. As Hay and Hanson observed, “far too often reading can become a passive act of decoding and temporary absorption” (17). Literature circles offer students a wide opportunity for choice. The real world is filled with choices; practicing how to make choices can be a real-world skill that students can work on during literature circles. Often times, students can choose which material they will be reading. Students can choose how to interpret their specific role. They can also choose which material from the text they will
bring up in the literature circle discussion. With literature circles, “teachers and students have the opportunity to exchange thoughts on any given character or plot of the story – without concerns about being correct” (Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening 76). Students can choose to discuss the character or plots that they best feel connected with, or even a disconnected with. Giving students these types of choices in the classroom can help stir up human feelings in a safe environment. Often times literature circles lend themselves to give students choices in assessment. For example, teachers can give students a choice board at the end of each week, month, chapter, or the entire novel. Students can choose how to show their new knowledge and understanding. Most likely, students will feel empowered and enjoy the opportunity to get to make choices in the classroom.

7. Literature circles foster student responsibility.
Teachers aspire to create individual and responsible students. When students take responsibility for their own education, it becomes much more meaningful to them. Literature circles take the responsibility of learning off of the teacher and transfer it to the students (Gambrell and Almasi18). Each group member is responsible to the group as a whole. If one member does not participate or bring in prepared work, it can affect the entire group. While students learn to be responsible for themselves, they might also pick up on tactics for helping their group members, thus taking some responsibility for the group as a whole. In some classroom literature circles, students “decide how many pages to read for each session” (Stringer, Reynolds, and Simpson 70). All literature circles force each student to take “responsibility for preparing the discussion that will ensue by taking notes” and organizing information to present to the group (70). Literature circles help students involved in the discussions “learn not only how to interact socially and develop communicative competence, but [how to] take responsibility for their own learning” (Gambrell and Almasi 19). The real world is full of responsibility, and the sooner students learn how to handle that, the better off they will be in the long run.
In other forms of learning, such as a large class discussion, struggling readers could potentially be at a disadvantage. These students "may be silences by procedures that require them to discuss tests with peers who read more quickly and proficiently" (Blum, Lipsett, and Yocum 100). These same students might require more time to come up with a response, but with other students shouting out the right answers quickly, raising their hands immediately, they may become discouraged. Literature circles allow these students to learn that if they are responsible and prepare ahead of time, they can quickly become an excellent asset in their small group. They can take their time in preparing their responses and questions, and then present to their group member’s in a safe and stable environment. Once they experience the benefits of preparing ahead of time, they will stay responsible in order to repeat that confident feeling in the classroom.

8. Literature circles strengthen student critical thinking.
Critical thinking gives students the skills to answer higher-end questions. Critical thinking is extremely important in the classroom, but it is also one of the life skills that can help students become better people in society. With this said, literature circles can be a strong method for helping teachers to teach critical thinking skills. Literature circles can take “students beyond ‘It was a good book and I liked it’ or ‘It was junk.’” (Mizokawa and Hansen-Krening 76). Furthermore, literature circles allow teachers the opportunity to “ask students questions that will gradually move them into analyzing their responses” (76). Hudgins and Edelman conducted a study that “examined the effects of participation in small group discussions on critical thinking” (Gambrell and Almasi 30). They found that students in the experimental group “provided more supporting evidence for conclusions during the discussions” (30). Almasi then conducted her own experiment that “compared student-led and teacher-led discussion groups” (31). This study found that student-led discussions “allowed the students a more participatory role in the interpretation of text [and students to engage] in higher level thinking and problem solving” (31). The study also concluded “the students-led discussions were typified
by more student talk, higher level thinking, wider participation from group members, greater cohesion within the group, and richer inquiry” (31).

All classrooms are faced with a diversity of learning abilities and styles, and therefore, all students have individual aptitudes for critical thinking. Blum, Lipsett, and Yocum remind teachers that classrooms today are “more diverse than ever” and “teachers must rely on their own abilities to instruct students” (99). The issue for teachers, then, is to “consider the most effective practices and procedures for enhancing the educational outcomes” for all individual students. Teachers need to create a classroom environment that allows all of the students to reach their own individual potential. Literature circles allow students to explore their own critical thinking methods, not regurgitate the teacher’s answer on an essay test. Literature circles “encourages [students] to develop a variety of reading strategies, and encourages them to develop in their metacognition of how these work for them and can help them understand what they read” (Blum, Lipsett, and Yocum 99–100). Furthermore, “like self-determination curricula, literature circles promote interpersonal relationships through
discussion, self-perception, problem solving, and decision-making," which can all help increase students' critical thinking abilities (100).

Ketch observes the fact that "teachers who model cognitive strategies and foster student discussion know that strategies get better as students who practice their use" (8). Just as teachers tell students not to give up if they do not master a concept immediately, teachers cannot give up if a teaching method initially struggles. Ketch argues that teachers need to "recognize the value in providing time for students to reflect, form ideas, cite evidence of their evolving thinking, and comprehend" (8). By setting aside class time for these classroom events, teachers are showing students that they value the importance of these events. While it may be hard to give up reins to students to lead discussions, it is important to remember that "conversation is a basis for critical thinking. It is the thread that ties together cognitive strategies and provides students with the practice that becomes the foundation for reading, writing, and thinking" (8). No, students will not all be perfect discussion members their first try. Some students might not ever become great discussion members. But teachers can be the foundation that starts the growth of students' critical
thinking. Ketch concludes that with time and practice, "students actively engaged in the conversation process can [...] become reflective, critical thinkers" (8).

9. Literature circles construct collaborative classrooms and encourage cooperative learning.

Tying all of these benefits together leads to collaborative classrooms and cooperative learning. Cooperative learning has been worshipped for years, but as DaLie points out, it is too often set up so that students will fail at it. Teachers put students "into groups and give them complex tasks that require them to know how to speak, listen, negotiate, delegate, initiate, and compromise [...] while assuming they have the skills to do all of these things successfully!" (99). Frequently, when these small group activities inevitably fail, teachers abandon them in total. DaLie explains, however, how literature circles can "avoid those fatal assumptions" since literature
circles “provide a safe and supportive structure within which students can interact” (99).

Instead of teaching for memorization or regurgitation, literature circles actually encourage diverse thinking and interpretations of a text. Within this environment, students can “become valuable resources for each other” (Hill, Johnson, and Noe 7). Students learn who are experts on different topics and use their expertise at a later date. Literature circles, then, encourage students to value each other’s individual expertise, interests, and interpretations. These values thus create a collaborative classroom for teachers. Sharing all of this different and unique knowledge can help to “expand a student’s limited perceptions” (Gambrell and Almasi 17). Literature circles teach students empathy through considering multiple perspectives on different topics. Moreover, students can “function as tutors for one another as they learn how to interpret text” (17). Just as teachers better understand content as they teach it to students, students can better understand content as they explain it to other peers.

Gambrell and Almasi shared that in their initial experiences with literature circles, they were upset to find out that students were not finding
the interpretations that they had hoped they would. In time, though, Gambrell and Almasi soon learned that these “discussions helped [them to] realize the importance of listening to students” (79). While their students did not ask the same teacher questions, Gambrell and Almasi soon saw the value of their student questions. They figured out that although “the students’ interpretations [were] not necessarily [their] interpretations [they made Gambrell and Almasi] aware of [the students’] thinking, backgrounds, and beliefs about life” (79). The teachers were able to appreciate their students’ interpretations of the text as small windows into their lives. Learning and understanding student interpretations can help any teacher become closer to their students’ levels. By giving voice to individual students, a more collaborative and cohesive classroom can be created; thus lending to an overall better learning environment for both teacher and students.
Example
The following pages are several excerpts from an example unit plan utilizing literature circles. The unit plan was created for an English Education methods course [English 395] at Ball State University. The unit plan is based around the essential question: What is Friendship? Jerry Spinelli’s *Stargirl* is the center of this particular unit plan and literature circle experience.

The *What Is Friendship? Unit Plan Calendar* is merely a suggestion for a specific unit plan. The unit plan is centered around literature circles that convene three times a week. The literature circle members are held accountable because at the end of each circle, members will fill out an evaluation on themselves and each other. Attached is an example of a literature circle lesson plan and evaluation rubrics. At the end of each class period when a literature circle meets, students will be prompted to write in their ThinkBooks [notebook journals] about that day’s experience. ThinkBooks are also used throughout the unit for bell work, free writing, and other various purposes. The ThinkBooks will be collected at the end of the unit to be graded.
The literature circles lead up to a culminating group activity in which the groups are to recreate *Stargirl* in contemporary form [see Final Project: Lights, Camera, Action! handout]. The Tuesdays and Thursdays when literature circles are not in session, then, are dedicated to other various mini-lessons, assignments, and/or projects:

- **Moment in Friendship: Police Report ROUND ONE**
- **Unmagnetic Poetry Activity**
- **Brochure Project**
- **Final Paper [Moment in Friendship: Police Report ROUND TWO]**
- **Writing Workshop**
- **Final Project: Lights, Camera, Action!**

Again, however, this is just a suggestion for how to implement literature circles into the classroom.
# What is Friendship? Unit Plan Calendar

**Miss Bernier's 9th Grade English**

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<th>Sun</th>
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| 1 | No School: Labor Day | 2 | Introduction Day I  
- Frontloading  
- Assign Paper  
(Moment in Friendship: Police Report) | 3 | Introduction Day II  
- Frontloading  
- Work on Moment in Friendship: Police Reports (PRs) | 4 | Brochure Day/Work on Paper  
- Introduce Lit Circles and Roles  
- Work on PRs | 5 | Questions, etc./Silent Reading  
- PRs DUE  
- Discuss Next Unit  
- Silent Reading | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 |
| Literature Circle  
- First Lit Circle: Run-Through  
- Pages 1-21 | Literature Circle  
- Unmagnetic Poetry  
- Unmagnetic Poetry activity with partner  
- "perfect friend" discussion | Literature Circle  
- Pages 22-47 | Literature Circle  
- Silent Reading  
- Silent Read *Stargirl*  
- Introduce Brochure Project | Literature Circle  
- Pages 48-67 | 12 | |
| 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 |
| Literature Circle  
- Pages 68-94 | Brochure Project Day I  
- Library  
- Work on brochures | Brochure Project Day II  
- Library  
- Work on brochures  
- Present brochures | Literature Circle  
- Pages 95-118 | 18 | Introduce Final Paper & Silent Read/Work | 19 |
| 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 |
| Literature Circle  
- Pages 119-144 | Writing Workshop  
- Strong Noun/Adjective Activity  
- Peer Edit Rough Drafts | Literature Circle  
- Pages 145-166 | Conferences & Silent Read/Work | Literature Circle  
- Final Lit Circle!  
- Pages 167-186  
- Collect Think Books | 26 | |
| 28 | 29 | 30 | | | | |
| *Stargirl* Whole Class Discussion  
- Discussion  
- Introduce final project | Group Work Day | | | | | |
# WHAT IS FRIENDSHIP? UNIT PLAN CALENDER

**MISS BERNIER’S 9TH GRADE ENGLISH**

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<td><strong>Group Work Day</strong></td>
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<td><strong>In Class Essay</strong></td>
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**What is Friendship?**
Day 5: Literature Circle

**Focus:**
Today we will be holding our first Literature Circle. Students will be in their Literature Circles and the Discussion Director will be orchestrating the circle, making sure each group member had a chance to share what they have prepared for class for their own personal role for pages 1-21.

**Objectives:**
1. Students will learn how to participate effectively in a group by fulfilling individual roles.
2. Students will learn how to time manage in a group.
3. Students will learn how to gain a better understanding of a text in a group.

**Materials:**
- *Stargirl*
- Literature Circle Notebook for individual groups
- Peer Evaluation Sheets
- Student Think Books

**Strategies:**
- Literature Circles
- Small Group Discussion
- Peer Evaluating
- Journal Writing

**Procedure:**
(Since this is the first run-through, today’s Literature Circle will be more structured by me, the teacher, than ones on the future will be.)
1. Instruct students to get into their Literature Circles.
2. Inform the Discussion Director to open their group’s “Literature Circle Notebook” and take attendance by checking next to who is present that day.
3. Next, instruct the Discussion Director to start the discussion with the question they have prepared to begin the Literature Circle.
4. Discuss.
5. Next, have the Discussion Director work around the group calling on each of the roles. Let each person talk until I, the teacher, say “change.” Give students 5 minutes for each role to talk (5 roles total)
6. Now, give the groups time to share and discuss any vocabulary or connections they found with their own lives in *Stargirl*.
7. With ten minutes to go in the class, have groups review from “Literature Circle Notebook” who has what role for the next Literature Circle.
8. Have students return to seats.
9. Pass out peer evaluations sheets and give students time to fill them out.
10. Have students write in their Think Books to answer the question: “What is one thing about today’s reading for Stargirl that you understand better or have a new understanding of now that you’ve met and worked in your Literature Circle group?”

Assessment:
1. I can check to see if this objective has been met by collecting the Peer Evaluation sheets to make sure students were prepared to fulfill individual roles within groups.
2. This objective will be met if each group has allowed each student a chance to share what he/she has prepared in his/her role for the Literature Circle that day.
3. I can check to see if this objective has been met by reading the Think Book responses to the prompt: “What is one thing about today’s reading for Stargirl that you understand better or have a new understanding of now that you’ve met and worked in your Literature Circle group?”
**Literature Circle: Peer Evaluation Sheet (for each group member including yourself)**

| Your Name: __________________________ |
| Class Period: ________________________ |
| Date: ______________________________ |

| Name: ______________________________ |

| Exhibited Appropriate Behavior | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |
| Seemed to Complete the Reading for Today | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |
| Came Prepared to Fulfill His/Her Role | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |

Comments:

I think this person deserves a ____ /6 for the Literature Circle today

| Name: ______________________________ |

| Exhibited Appropriate Behavior | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |
| Seemed to Complete the Reading for Today | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |
| Came Prepared to Fulfill His/Her Role | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |

Comments:

I think this person deserves a ____ /6 for the Literature Circle today

| Name: ______________________________ |

| Exhibited Appropriate Behavior | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |
| Seemed to Complete the Reading for Today | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |
| Came Prepared to Fulfill His/Her Role | Completely (2) | Somewhat (1) | Not At All (0) |

Comments:

I think this person deserves a ____ /6 for the Literature Circle today
Name: ______________________

Exhibited Appropriate Behavior Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Seemed to Complete the Reading for Today Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Came Prepared to Fulfill His/Her Role Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Comments:

I think this person deserves a ___ /6 for the Literature Circle today

Name: ______________________

Exhibited Appropriate Behavior Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Seemed to Complete the Reading for Today Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Came Prepared to Fulfill His/Her Role Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Comments:

I think this person deserves a ___ /6 for the Literature Circle today

Name: ______________________

Exhibited Appropriate Behavior Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Seemed to Complete the Reading for Today Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Came Prepared to Fulfill His/Her Role Completely (2) Somewhat (1) Not At All (0)
Comments:

I think this person deserves a ___ /6 for the Literature Circle today

Did your group get through all of the Roles today? Yes No

If no, what DIDN’T you get through, and why? __________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
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What is Friendship?
Day 17: Literature Circle

Focus:
Today we will be holding another Literature Circle. Students will be in their Literature Circles and the Discussion Director will be orchestrating the circle, making sure each group member had a chance to share what they have prepared for class for their own personal role for pages 145-166.

Objectives:
1. Students will learn how to participate effectively in a group by fulfilling individual roles.
2. Students will learn how to time manage in a group.
3. Students will learn how to gain a better understanding of a text using the ideas from other readers and writers in a group.

Materials:
Stargirl
Literature Circle Notebooks for individual groups
Peer Evaluation Sheets
Student Think Books

Strategies:
Literature Circles
Small Group Discussion
Peer Evaluating
Journal Writing

Procedure:
1. Instruct students to get into their Literature Circles.
2. Inform the Discussion Director to open their group’s “Literature Circle Notebook” and take attendance by checking next to who is present that day.
3. Next, instruct the Discussion Director to start the discussion with the question they have prepared to begin the Literature Circle.
4. Discuss.
5. Next, have the Discussion Director work around the group calling on each of the roles. Make sure groups know they need to time manage and get through all of the roles today.
6. With 15 minutes left in class, give the groups time to share and discuss any vocabulary or connections they found with their own lives in Stargirl.
7. With ten minutes to go in the class, have groups review from “Literature Circle Notebook” who has what role for the next Literature Circle.
8. Have students return to seats.
9. Pass out peer evaluations sheets and give students time to fill them out.
10. Have students write in their Think Books to answer the question: “What is one thing about today’s reading for Stargirl that you understand better or have a new understanding of now that you’ve met and worked in your Literature Circle group?”
Moment in Friendship: Police Report – ROUND ONE

Due: Friday

Often police ask witnesses of a crime to re-create an exact detail of what they saw. Think of a moment in your life when friendship was evident. Maybe someone stuck up for you in front of a group, or maybe a friend brought you soup when you were home sick. Whatever the moment is you choose to write about, try to make it as detailed and exact as possible.

In a Police Report fashion, write up the details of this experience in your life. Include as many details as possible: what people were wearing, where you were, how old you were, how you felt, etc. Then, write about WHY you chose THIS moment in friendship. Explain to me WHY this moment displayed friendship. Your paper should be at least 2 pages double-spaced, and no more than 3 pages double-spaced.

On Thursday, bring your rough drafts in and you will be able to meet with me and ask questions if necessary. Friday I will collect the papers. I will be looking for details, but most importantly I will be focusing on why you chose this moment in friendship and why you feel this moment displayed friendship. This paper will be collected and graded. Later in the unit, you will receive these papers back and we will expand on them more.

=25 points total [see attached]
Student: ______________________
Class Period: ______________________

Five Points for Turning in Paper on Time __/5
Five Points if Paper is 2-3 pages ___/5
Five Points for Detailed Moment in Time ___/5
Five Points for Why You Chose This Moment ___/5
Five Points for Why This Moment Displays Friendship ___/5

=25 points total. ___/25

Turned in On Time
Yes(5) One Day Late(2) More Than One Day Late(0)

2-3 Pages
Yes(5) On the Second page, but Not Complete(2) One or Less(0)

Detailed Moment in Time
Completed, detailed(5) Completed, Undetailed(3) Begun,Incomplete(1) Not Answered(0)

Why You Chose This Moment
Completed, detailed(5) Completed, Undetailed(3) Begun,Incomplete(1) Not Answered(0)

Why This Moment Displays Friendship
Completed, detailed(5) Completed, Undetailed(3) Begun,Incomplete(1) Not Answered(0)

Comments: ______________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
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What is Friendship?
Day 6: Unmagnetic Poetry

Focus:
Today we will be doing a partner unmagentic poetry activity. Students will be using words from a poem entitled “The Perfect Friend.” At the end of class we will discuss that idea of “a perfect friend” to decide its validity.

Objectives:
1. Students will learn how to construct given words to fit the poem title, “The Perfect Friend.”
2. Students will apply and compare their revised poem to the feelings and issues within the real poem, their own personal friendships, other people’s friendships, and Stargirl.

Materials:
“The Perfect Friend” by Shannen Wrass
“The Perfect Friend” cut into separate words and pieces in Ziploc bags.
Glue sticks
Construction Paper

Strategies:
Unmagnetic Poetry Partner activity
Whole Class Discussion

Procedure:
1. Pair up students in partners and have the partners put their desks next to each other.
2. Pass out a piece of colored construction paper, a glue stick, and a Ziploc bag of cut up words of “The Perfect Friend” to each pair.
3. Instruct students to *carefully* dump out words in the bags and arrange them so they can see all of the words.
4. Then explain to students to organize the words to make a poem that they feel best fits the title “The Perfect Friend” and glue the words on their piece of construction paper.
5. After students have finished gluing their poem together, tell them to pick a favorite line of poetry that they feel best describes the title “The Perfect Friend.”
6. Ask for two volunteer students (from different groups) to write on the board.
6. Going around the pairs, have each pair share their best line of poetry with the class, while the 2 students take turns writing the lines on the board.
7. After each pair has shared their best sentence, ask the class if there are any common ideas between some of the lines on the board.
8. Read aloud the real poem, “The Perfect Friend.”
9. Now that students know “The Perfect Friend” is actually “nothing but a mirror,” discuss the validity of the phrase “a perfect friend.”
10. Discuss what makes a perfect friend and whether or not that is the same for different people.
11. Discuss how this relates to our novel, Stargirl.
Assessment:
1. I can check to see if this objective has been met by collecting the student’s recreated poems. I will read them to check for understanding of the title “A Perfect Friend.” (i.e. their poem should make some coherent sense while describing a friendship)
2. Discussion should demonstrate that this objective has been met. I will be listening to see that students understood how their poems compare to the feelings and issues within the real poem, their own personal friendships, other people’s friendships, and Stargirl.
The Perfect Friend
by Shannen Wrass

Today I found a friend
who knew everything I felt
she knew my weakness
and the problems I've been dealt.
She understood my wonders
and listened to my dreams,
she listened to how I felt about life and love
and knew what it all means.
Not once did she interrupt me
or tell me I was wrong
she understood what I was going through
and promised she'd stay long.
I reached out to this friend,
to show her that I care
to pull her close and let her know
how much I need her there.
I went to hold her hand
to pull her a bit nearer
and I realized this perfect friend I found
was nothing but a mirror.
Today I reached nearer to my dreams.

I found a perfect friend;
she listened to my problems and understood everything about my life.

I understood her weakness and promised to listen to how she felt.

I knew she'd interrupt, but nothing was going wrong.

She realized friendship and love went hand in hand.

I let her know how much I care and what she means to me.

She wonders what I've been through and I show her who I am.

I knew I found a friend, and felt the need to stay close.

mock example by students
Friendship Brochure Project

The purpose of a brochure is to explain and inform. Like I gave you brochures to explain the Literature Circles and Roles, you will be making brochures to inform your classmates and me about a topic: friendship.

We will be going to the library Tuesday and Wednesday of next week to work on these brochures in Microsoft Publisher. Begin your rough drafts now, however, so you can spend time making your brochures look great rather than coming up with the content.

**Tuesday:** go to library; 15 minute tutorial on how to make a Microsoft Publisher brochure from library technology expert; work on brochure

**Wednesday:** go to library; work on brochures for 20 minutes; present brochures to groups (2-3 minutes, informal -- your group members will be grading you and you will grade yourself)

*Front Panel:* your name, class period, the date, the word friendship, picture of you and your best friend

*Back Panel:* Your favorite four lines from your “Friendship is like…” poem

*Remaining 4 “Body” Panels:*

1.) Description of your best friend, including your favorite memory with that person
2.) List of 10 things that you think are most important in a friendship
3.) Example of 5 stressors that can wear on a friendship
4.) Your own definition of friendship and the answer to this question: has your definition of friendship changed since you’ve started high school? Why or why not? And if it has, how has it?

=25 points total [see attached]
Friendship Brochures: Teacher Evaluation & Final Grade

Student: __________________________
Class Period: ______________________

Two Points for Front, Back, and Panels 1-3 (x 5 panels = 10 points) ___/10
Five Points for Panel 4 ___/5
Six Points for Completing the Brochure on Time ___/6
Nine Points Average from Peer Evaluations ___/9

=30 points total. ___/30

______________________________

Front Panel
Name, Class Period, Date, Friendship, and Picture 2pts.

Completed(2) Missing 1 or 2 Items(1) Missing 3 or More(0)

Back Panel
Your Favorite 4 lines from your “Friendship is like…” Poems

Completed(2) Only 2 or 3 Lines(1) Only 1 or 0 Lines(0)

Panel 1
Description of best friend, including your favorite memory with that person

Completed, detailed(2) Both Completed, Undetailed(1) Only 1 Included(0)

Panel 2
List of 10 things you think are most important in a friendship

10 Things(2) 6-9 Things(1) 5 or less Things(0)

Panel 3
Examples of 5 stressors that can wear on a friendship

5 Stressors(2) 3-4 Stressors(1) 0-2 Stressors (0)

Panel 4
Your own definition of Friendship and the answer to the question: Has your definition of friendship changed since you’ve start high school? Why or why not? And if it has, how has it?

Completed, detailed(5) Completed, Undetailed(3) Parts Missing(1) No definition(0)

Comments: __________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________
Friendship Brochures: Peer Evaluation

Your Name: _______________________
Class Period: ____________________
Date: ___________________________

Presenter’s Name: _______________________

Kept My Attention
Completed all Panels
Was Creative

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<th>Barely(1)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Very(3)</td>
<td>Sometimes(2)</td>
<td>Barely(1)</td>
<td>Not At All(0)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Comments:

I think this student deserves a ___/9 for their brochure presentation.
Moment in Friendship: Police Report – ROUND TWO

Remember those papers we wrote at the start of this unit? Now it’s time to take what we’ve been talking about for the past few weeks and put that in context with your original paper.

Due: Tuesday (in two Tuesdays)

First of all, we will be focusing even more on recreating that exact event in your life. While your original paper was 2-3 pages, this paper must be 5 pages double-spaced. Keeping in mind all we’ve talked about up until now – are your reasons behind choosing the moment you did the same? How did reading Stargirl affect your opinions? How did what we discussed in class, you discuss in your Literature Circle, and/or you see in a brochure project, or you learn about on your own during this unit change your opinion? This paper also must include a definition of what you think friendship is (check your brochure...!!). How did what we discussed in class, you discuss in your Literature Circle, and/or you see in a brochure project, or you learn about on your own during this unit help shape your definition?

Bring your rough drafts every day as you may get time to work on them in class. On this Tuesday, DEFINITELY bring your rough drafts because we will be having a writing workshop focusing on getting those specific nouns and adjectives in your paper.

You will have plenty of time to complete this paper, including ample class time!

=50 points [see attached]
Moment in Friendship: Police Report – Teacher Evaluation Grade Two

Student: ____________________________
Class Period: _______________________

Five Points for Turning in Paper on Time __/5
Five Points if Paper is 2-3 pages __/5
Five Points for Definition __/5
Five Points if Paper’s Improved since Writing Workshop __/5
Ten Points from “Criteria for Judging Writing Samples” (x 3) __/30

=50 points total. __/50

Turned in On Time

Yes(5) One Day Late(2) More Than One Day Late(0)

5 Pages

Yes(5) On the Fifth, but Not Complete(3) On the Fourth, but Not Complete(1) Three or Less(0)

Definition

Completed, detailed(5) Completed, Undetailed(3) Begun, Incomplete(1) Not Answered(0)

Improvement Since Writing Workshop

Substantial(5) Moderate(3) Barely(1) None(0)

Comments: __________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
CRITERIA FOR JUDGING WRITING SAMPLES

A SUPERIOR PAPER - 10
1. Writes on the assigned topic with clarity, imagination, and originality
2. Reflects an awareness of audience and purpose of the assignment
3. Has a logical organization of ideas
4. Uses ample relevant supportive material or anecdote
5. Shows command of sentence structure and language

A GOOD PAPER - 8
1. Writes on the assigned topic, with material that is clear, appropriate and interesting
2. Reflects an awareness of audience and purpose of the assignment
3. Has a logical organization of ideas
4. Uses sufficient material or relevant anecdotes
5. Shows competence in sentence structure and language
6. Contains a minimum of mechanical errors

AN ADEQUATE PAPER - 6
1. Writes on the assigned topic adequately
2. Has discernible organization
3. Includes some supportive material or anecdotes
4. Has reasonably adequate sentence sense
5. May contain mechanical errors which do not significantly interfere with meaning

A MARGINAL PAPER - 4
1. Responds to assigned topic but may ramble
2. May be weak in organization
3. May lack variety in word choices
4. May have inadequate supportive material
5. May contain mechanical errors which do not significantly interfere with meaning

A WEAK PAPER - 2
1. May be meagre in ideas and content
2. May ramble or stray from assigned topic
3. May lack clarity and appropriate word choice
4. May be weak in organization
5. May have frequent sentence structure errors
6. May contain mechanical errors which interfere with meaning

A VERY POOR PAPER - 0
1. Lacks content
2. May ramble or stray from assigned topic
3. Lacks clarity
4. Lacks organization
5. Frequent errors in sentence structure
6. Serious mechanical errors which interfere with meaning

NOTE: OVERWHELMING STRENGTHS IN SOME AREAS AND DEFICIENCIES IN OTHERS WILL REQUIRE SPECIAL CONSIDERATION.
What is Friendship?
Day 16: Writing Workshop

Focus:
This lesson will address writing more specifically and with more precision. In particular, this lesson will force students to look at their own writing and make their nouns and adjectives in it stronger.

Objectives:
1. Students will be able to look at a still image and write descriptions of what they see using strong nouns and adjectives.
2. Students will gain experience in identifying nouns and adjectives.
3. Students will be able to change highlighted nouns and adjectives to stronger nouns and adjectives.

Materials
The Picture -- Family Eating Tacos (provided by me)
Pencil and Paper (provided by the students, but I’ll have extras)
Yellow and Pink Highlighters (provided by me)
Red Pens, Blue Pens, and Black Pens (provided by me)
Thesauruses (provided by me)

Strategies:
Free Writing
Editing Classmate’s Free Writes
Whole Class Discussion

Procedure:
(Break up class into groups of 6 by counting off 1-6)
1. Pass out picture to each group and instruct students to think about all of the details in the picture.
2. Instruct students to first write, in pencil, their name on top of the paper and then begin to write a paragraph in pencil — skipping every other line — that they feel describes the picture. Tell them to include what kind of traits they think the people in the picture have. (i.e. The girl is nice, That man yelling is mean, etc.)
3. After they have finished writing, students will pass their papers to the left.
4. Tell students to write their name underneath their classmate’s name, highlight it in yellow, and then take a yellow highlighter and highlight all of the nouns that they can find in the paper in front of them.
5. After they have finished highlighting, students will pass those papers to the left again.
6. Tell students to write their name underneath their classmates’ names, highlight it in pink/orange, and then take a pink/orange highlighter and highlight all of the adjectives that they can find in the paper in front of them.
7. After they have finished highlighting, students will pass those papers to the left again.
8. Talk to students about the benefits of making their nouns and adjectives more specific. Ask them if they have any ideas for how to change the sentence: “She is nice to the
people." (i.e. Kelly shares her markers with her classmates.) Discuss examples of strong nouns and adjectives. (i.e. green cup vs. lime green glass coffee mug)

9. Tell students to write their name in red pen underneath their classmate’s names and look through the highlighted nouns or adjectives and make three changes to more specific or stronger nouns or adjectives with red pen. If it helps, they can change whole sentences. I will share the thesaurus with students in case they need ideas for new words.

11. After they have made three changes, students will pass those papers to the left again.

12. Repeat Steps 9 and 11 until students have their original papers back (changing the color of the pen each time).

13. Instruct students to read over their new paragraphs and notice the changes their classmates have made.

14. In Big Group Discussion, ask for volunteers from each group to share their new paragraphs with the whole class.

15. Discuss how these changes helped change their papers.

16. Collect the papers.

17. Next, pair students into partners and have them share exchange rough drafts. Using the yellow highlighter for nouns and the pink/orange highlighter for adjectives, have students highlight the nouns and adjectives in their partner’s papers.

18. Instruct students to take some time now editing their own papers with red pens, concentrating on the weak highlighted nouns and adjectives their partners highlighted.

19. Instruct students to take home their drafts to edit them tonight and tomorrow night and to bring them back in two days for another writing and conferencing day.

Assessment:

1. This objective will be met if students are able to write sentences that are indeed about the picture they were given. I will know if they have been able to do this when I collect their papers and read them. They students would be given points just for completing today’s activity.

2. This objective will be met if students have correctly highlighted the nouns and adjectives. I would not do a formal assessment for this, but I would collect the papers to make sure the class overall understood the concept. Since I had them do their names they way they did I will know who had which job on which pieces of paper. This way, I can track down any student(s) if I notice them having substantial difficulties with the activity and give them some extra help when we conference for their papers.

3. This objective will be met if students have made thoughtful suggestions that do strengthen the nouns and adjectives. Again, I would not do a formal assessment for this, but I will collect the papers to make sure the class overall understood the concept. Also again, since I had them do their names they way they did, I will know who had which job on which pieces of paper. This way, I can track down any student(s) if I notice them having substantial difficulties with the activity and give them some extra help when we conference for their papers.
Final Project: Lights, Camera, Action!

1. Recreate Stargirl in drama form. You can contemporize it, change the names, places, settings, etc., but keep the message of the book the same. (So if the book ends with a wedding, don't end your play with a death. If the theme of the book is trying not to judge quickly, keep that theme.) You can use whatever props or costumes you wish: BE CREATIVE. I'm not giving you many guidelines here, so take advantage of that. You will be graded on relevance of your recreation, organization, preparations, and effort/creativity.

2. Your presentation should be somewhere between 7 and 10 minutes and have all group members playing large roles. (narrator, main characters, several small characters, etc.)

3. You will have all class period Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and the first half of Friday to work on this project. Tuesday you will have to turn in an informal proposal to me at the end of class (it can just be your plan of attack/notes from the day). Try to get a general script started as soon as possible. I will always be walking around to help you.

4. The second half of class Friday each group will separately show me a "script" that they have prepared in a mini-verbal proposal method. I will be able to give you feedback, and you will have the weekend to prepare: 3 groups will present Monday and 2 group will present Tuesday.

5. Each student will turn in a short paper (approx. 1 page) discussing your role in the presentation, how you feel your group worked together, and why you chose to make the decisions you did. (i.e. costumes, casting, etc.) (20 points just for completing this part!!)

Monday and Tuesday

1. Monday we will all be in "movie theatre mode."

2. While that means popcorn, it also means we will be quiet and listen to our classmates present.

3. Between wiping your hands from the butter and chomping on popcorn, you will be peer evaluating your classmates.

4. After your presentation, you will evaluate your own group as well.

40 points for preparation

and

40 points for presentation

***Many points are easy if you just stay on task and put effort into the project!! (take advantage of these points!)***

=80 points [see attached]
Final Projects: Evaluation of Other Groups

Your Name: ____________________________
Class Period: __________________________
Date: _________________________________

Group Members: ________________________________

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate Costumes/Props</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kept My Attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparedness of Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was Creative</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Correctly Represented Stargirl</td>
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Comments:

I think this group deserves a ___/10 for their final project.
Final Projects: Peer Evaluation Sheet *(for each group member including yourself)*

Your Name: _______________________
Class Period: _______________________
Date: ________________________________

Name: _______________________

<table>
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<th>Sometimes(1)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Contributed ideas to group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did assigned tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was productive</td>
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<td>Treated others with respect</td>
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<td>Comments:</td>
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I think this person deserves a ____/10 for his/her contribution to our final project.

Name: _______________________

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I think this person deserves a ____/10 for his/her contribution to our final project.

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I think this person deserves a ____/10 for his/her contribution to our final project.
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<td>I think this person deserves a ___/10 for his/her contribution to our final project.</td>
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Final Presentation – Teacher Evaluation and Final Grade

Student: ______________________
Class Period: ______________________

Preparation:
5 Points for Working Productively In Class (x 3 days) ______/15
15 Points For Mini-Verbal Proposal to Me ______/15
20 Points for One Page Write-Up ______/20

Presentation:
10 Points for Effort ______/10
7 Points for Presentation ______/7
3 Points for Being Within 7-10 Minutes ______/3
10 Points Average Group Peer Evaluations ______/10
10 Points Correctness/Validity of recreation of Stargirl ______/10
10 Points Average of Students Peer Evaluation (Whole Group Grade) ______/10

=80 points total. ______/80

Preparation:

Day One
Productive(5) Somewhat Productive(3) Not Present/Not productive(0)

Day Two
Productive(5) Somewhat Productive(3) Not Present/Not productive(0)

Day Three
Productive(5) Somewhat Productive(3) Not Present/Not productive(0)

Mini-Verbal Proposal
Prepared, Coherent Proposal(15) Prepared, Confusing Proposal(10)
Confusing Proposal(5) No Proposal Ready(0)

One Page Write-Up
One Full Page Answering All 3 Questions(20) Less than One Page Answering All 3 Questions(15)
Two Questions Answered(10) One Question Answered(5) NO PAPER(0)
Presentation:

Effort

Obvious Substantial Effort(10) Some Effort(5) Little Effort(2) No Effort(0)

Actual Presentation
Good Eye Contact, Tone, Preparedness of Student, Creativity, captured Audience’s Attention

All Areas Covered Well(10)
Lacking One Area(7)
Lacking in Two Areas(5)
Lacking in Three Areas(3)
Lacking in All Areas But One(1)
Lacking in All Areas(0)

Time

7-10 minutes(3) 5-6 Minutes(1) 0-4 Minutes(0)

Correctness/Validity of Recreation of Stargirl

Recreation Valid(10) Mostly Valid, Some Incorrectness(5) Unrelated to Stargirl(0)

Comments: ________________________________
Reflection
I knew writing an Honor Thesis was going to be a lot of work, but I never imagined it would be this much. It would be an understatement to say that I learned a lot about literature circles during this experience. I thought I had a good understanding of the ins and outs of literature circles going into this thesis experience. I soon realized there was much more that went into them than I originally had thought. However, after finishing the thesis I feel that I could better implement a literature circle into my own classroom.

I also learned a lot about the writing process and time management in general. One of my professional goals is to someday write a book dealing with English Secondary Education Methods. Writing this field guide gave me a lot of insight into what might be required to achieve my goal. One of the things that helped me the most with this thesis was having deadlines. Since I had an advisor, Mrs. Dalton, I had someone to give drafts. We set up several meetings; I would bring drafts and questions to these meetings. I know that if I ever do write a book, I will make sure that I have deadlines during the process. Projects such as these can sometimes seem too big to accomplish, or have too many steps
to know where to even begin. Having deadlines, though, helps make these types of projects much more manageable and seem less threatening. Deadlines made it possible for me to set and accomplish attainable goals throughout the entire process. Since, with a full course load, student teaching, working, planning a wedding, I was not able to just solely focus on this thesis, it helped to have smaller sections to focus on at a time. I know that when I am ready to write my own book chances are I will have a lot on my plate then, too. This thesis, therefore, gave me the necessary skills to be able to accomplish a similar goal later in life.

None of my teachers ever implemented literature circles in one of my classrooms. A few of my college professors mentioned them in class, but never went into great detail about them. When I first embarked on this project I wasn’t sure how many resources I would be able to find. I was pleasantly pleased, then, when I realized what a vast variety of resources were available to me. As my Works Cited page indicates, I was able to both find and utilize many sources. In fact, I found so many resources that I had to start a Helpful Resources for those sources that could be helpful but I did not have room for in this thesis.
Before I began researching literature circles I was fairly confident that I would be able to prove my original hypothesis true; Literature circles are always possible in any classroom. I was planning on convincing my readers how practical and applicable literature circles in the classroom could be. There were times during my research and personal student teaching experience, though, that I began to question my own thoughts. There were other times during my research that I began to question my questioning...

After completing this research project I still believe literature circles are extremely possible and useful. I am eager—and much more prepared—to implement this teaching strategy into my own classroom next year. I believe the benefits of literature circles far outweigh their possible shortcomings.

In the same sense, however, during and after finishing this field guide I came to see my own naivety about the implementation of literature circles. It is not that I think literature circles are impossible, rather, that there is just more involved with the process than I had first
imagined. For example, students need to come to the classroom already with certain skills in place; reading, critical thinking, responsibility, time management, and cooperation. While literature circles help further develop these skills, there needs to be a foundation to build upon. As I found in my own student teaching experience many students (juniors and seniors) don’t have these basic and essential skills already in place. Therefore, it was more necessary for me to spend my time developing these foundational skills than moving onto something that would have potentially been an unattainable goal for them. On the other hand, if this were my own class I could have spent the first semester strengthening and developing these skills so second semester we could have integrated literature circles into our curriculum.

Taking all of this into consideration, I have been able to slightly alter my original hypotheses. While I still believe literature circles are very possible in any classroom, I know that it is not without much consideration and preparation by the teacher beforehand. I found that one of the biggest keys to literature circles success is knowing the students involved in the process. Understanding their various abilities,
interests, work habits, and attitudes can help the teacher best formulate the type and kind of literature circle to be used. Yes, it is more work to prepare differentiated lessons, detailed outlines, and extravagant mini-lessons to enhance the readings than to just go with "the flow". This preparation, however, should help eliminate potential issues that can arise and hinder the literature circle experience. I have learned it is better to prepare for different potential issues that could arise during the experience and never have to use them than to be forced to have to come up with a thrown together backup plan on the spot. I know see how much work literature circles in the classroom will be, but this has not deterred me from believing in their benefits and wanting to integrate them into my future classroom. Now that I am prepared to do so, I am looking forward to enhancing my teaching and classroom environment with literature circles.
Works Cited & Other Resources
Works Cited

<http://www.bsu.edu/libraries/electronsources/databases.asp>.

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Daniels, Harvey. “What’s the Next Big Thing with Literature Circles?” Voices From the Middle. 13.4 May 2006: 10–15.


Of course, I could not possibly use every resource I came across during my research. Here I have compiled all of those noteworthy resources that I found, but did not have the opportunity to utilize in this field guide.

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