
● Introduction ●

Succeeding with Lit Circles provides an easy-to-follow, step-by-step format that will help you create effective literature circles in your classroom. Lit Circles combine a skills mini-lesson, independent or small-group reading, writing, book discussions and concluding activities that are shared by the whole class. Help your students discover the joy of reading and become life-long readers by providing an opportunity for them to participate in a classroom literature circle.

Highlights of the Book

TEACHER BOOK SELECTION

Choosing the right books for your students to read is a very important element of the unit. The Teacher Book Selection page gives you ideas for selecting and gathering the books you will need.

STUDENT BOOK SELECTION

Establish a Meet-the-Books session to familiarise students with the book choices you have made for the unit. Students then fill out Choice Sheets to help with book selection and group placement.

GROUPING

Several methods of grouping are discussed. Although there may be times when you want to have above-level readers working together in a group, heterogeneous grouping is usually recommended. Struggling readers will gain understanding and vocabulary by listening to others read and by joining in the discussions.

SOCIAL SKILLS

In order for a Lit Circle to be successful, students must follow certain basic rules appropriate for cooperative learning. Most involve common courtesy and thoughtfulness. A Social-Skills Chart is included, but students should be encouraged to add to the chart.

COMPREHENSION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Discussion is the backbone of the literature circle. Asking the correct questions enhances the enjoyment and understanding of the story. Guidelines for asking questions that promote effective discussion are explained. Students will use Lit Logs to record their reading responses and answers to questions.

PROJECTS

Project ideas, suitable for many books, are provided to help students select and create meaningful extension projects. Examples of book-specific, post-reading activities from several *L-I-T Guides*, written by the authors and published by Hawker Brownlow Education, are also provided.

LIT-CIRCLE ROLES

Six roles that are important to the success of the literature circle are carefully explained in this section of the book. If your class is large, other roles may be added. Use the two Aesop's fables to practise the roles with your class.

CULMINATING ACTIVITIES

Story Skits, Literary Wax Museum and Lit Premiership are exciting and effective culminating events your students will enjoy. Directions for creating them in your classroom are given in this section.

ASSESSMENT

The Teacher Record Form, Observation Form, Self-Evaluation Form and Group-Evaluation Form are provided to help determine your students' competency. You may wish to develop other types of assessments, such as project rubrics or anecdotal records. Use the included assessments as they are presented or as a guide to help you develop your own forms.

GLOSSARY

The glossary contains a list of literary terms that can be used as the basis of mini-lessons with your students.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books that are well written and which contain material appropriate for Lit-Circle discussion groups are listed in the Bibliography. Separate lists are provided for Years 3–4, Years 5–6 and Years 7–8.

What Are Lit Circles?

Lit Circles provide new ways of thinking about teaching reading and writing. They are small groups of students (three to six students are advisable) who get together on a regular basis to read and talk about a novel, short story or poem with their peers. These literature circles may vary according to reading requirements, group roles, method of selecting literature, assessment techniques and time limitations.

Within their literature circles, students have the opportunity to engage in lively discussions and share interpretations of the literature that they are reading together. Readers are encouraged to make connections between the stories that they read and their personal lives, and to help each other construct meaning from the material that they are reading. By teaching the social skills of cooperative learning, the teacher can make sure that all students are able to fully participate in the literature discussions.

Choice is an important and motivating component of literature circles. Students are asked to choose the books they would like to read in their Lit Circle from among those suggested and described by the teacher. They may also choose or create their own questions to use in Lit-Circle discussions, as well as decide upon the number of pages to be read at each session.

As part of the Lit-Circle process, students are given many varied opportunities to develop their higher-level, critical- and creative-thinking skills through challenging writing responses to literature and purposeful projects that are related to their reading.

Observations and anecdotal records of each student's participation in Lit-Circle discussions are often utilised in assessing the students' learning accomplishments. Group and self-evaluations that encourage students to think about their own effectiveness are also necessary evaluation tools.

Why Are Lit Circles Effective?

Lit Circles benefit students' reading development in a number of ways. Students learn to respond to open-ended questions, to make inferences, to connect ideas and to make predictions. They also gain an understanding of literary devices, enhance their vocabularies and improve their comprehension skills. In addition, students engage in cooperative-learning opportunities that provide the foundation for the development of social-interaction skills. Through Lit-Circle discussions, students will greatly improve their skills in oral communication by talking about the story and voicing opinions in a logical context.

By participating in active reading experiences such as literature circles, students are more motivated to read and are more able to retain what they have read. Their understanding of the reading material is enhanced. Because students are exposed to varying opinions and perspectives during group-discussion periods, their ability to think critically is expanded. By working in small groups, students develop more self-confidence about contributing an idea or offering an opinion, and there are more opportunities for every student to participate fully in the literature-circle discussion. More-able readers act as peer mentors by modelling the skill of reading with fluency and expression.

Literature circles are an important part of a balanced literacy program, which should also include modelled reading, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, modelled writing, shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing and independent writing. During the process of literature circles, students are given many opportunities to be involved in activities at the different levels of balanced literacy.

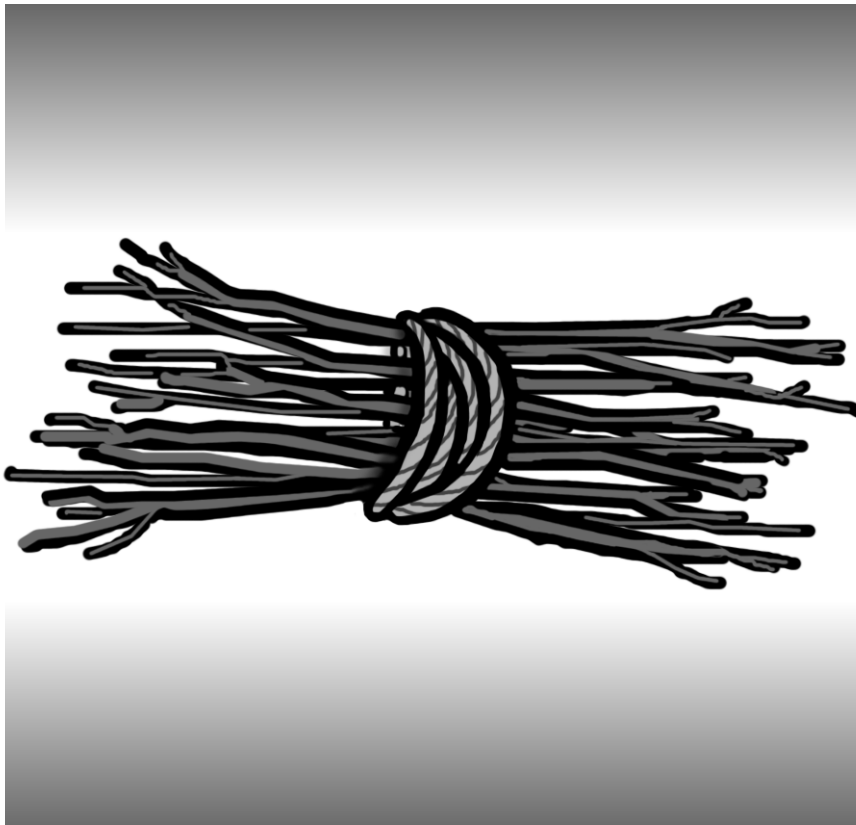
● Role-Playing Activities ●

AESOP'S FABLE: A Bundle of Sticks

SUMMARY

Long ago there lived a father who had four quarrelsome sons. The boys could not get along with each other, and that made the old man very sad. One day he decided to do something to solve the problem. First he gathered a bundle of sticks. Then he tied them together tightly and handed them to each of his sons. "Try to break the bundle," he said. But although each son tried hard, none of them was able to break the sturdy bundle of sticks.

Then the father untied the sticks and told his sons to break the sticks one by one. This proved to be a much easier task to complete, and soon all the sticks were broken. Finally, the father said to his sons, "If you all stick together, you will stand strong against your enemies. But if you do not cooperate with one another and support each other, your strength will be divided just like that of the sticks."



More Post-Reading Activities

SPECIFIC

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, by J. K. Rowling

In Chapter 17 Dumbledore made several meaningful statements. Write a paragraph with one of the following statements as the main idea:

“Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.”

“To have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved you is gone, will give us protection forever.”

“It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends.”

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee

Point of view is the voice used to tell the story's plot. In *To Kill a Mockingbird* the storyteller is Scout. Summarise the story, first from Scout's point of view and then from the point of view of Atticus or Jem.

Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White

Learn as much as you can about county fairs in America and why they are so popular in parts of the country. How are they similar to things like agricultural shows or fêtes in Australia, and how are they different? Make a poster and report to the class on your findings.

The Tale of Despereaux, by Kate DiCamillo

In the novel the main character often does things that conflict with his mouse heritage and the rules that come with it. Make a list of some customs or traditions that come from your own heritage. Bring to class some objects or foods that reflect that culture to share with others, or talk about how your heritage affects you.

The Summer of the Swans, by Betsy Byars

Charlie, Sara's younger brother, is autistic. With your classmates, discuss the real problems and dangers associated with this condition and how it affects both the people who have it and those who care for them.

A Wrinkle in Time, by Madeleine L'Engle

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin travel through time to Camazotz, a strange city ruled by an evil power. In this activity, you are asked to use your imagination to create your own city of the future. Write and/or sketch your ideas for each category. Then sketch a detailed city plan on a larger sheet of paper. You may wish to combine all of your ideas into a booklet. Include the following: Name of City, Government and Laws, Industries, Education, Sport, Public and Private Transportation, Architecture and Monetary System.