

### **Literature Circles or “Student Book Clubs”**

As the sixth grade students experience the 12-year-old-change they begin to demonstrate budding critical thinking skills and have more experience working with others collaboratively. It's at this time of their development that the teacher adds Literature Circles to the Independent Reading activities.

Literature Circles are similar to adult book clubs but have more structure and expectations. The circles consist of 4-5 students, grouped differently depending on the intent of each Literature Circle. The teacher facilitates full student engagement by giving the students both structured and unstructured time to respond and interpret what they are reading in a small group format.

Literature Circles are usually undertaken in 3-4 weeks blocks. In advance of a Literature Circle, the teacher first decides on the intent of the Literature Circle block. The teacher often decides to have the class explore a certain genre of literature through this small group experience. For example, the teacher may choose biographies as the focus genre while the students are in a Renaissance block. Secondly she gathers and reads or browses 2-5 choices of age-appropriate books for the students to choose from.

At the beginning of the Literature Circle the teacher gives a brief summary of each book—why it was chosen. Then the students are given time to read the back-cover copy for each book. Each student then chooses from the selection of books. Students who choose the same book form a Literature Circle for that block only. The students in each circle figure out how many pages per week they will read to complete the book in the weeks allotted. This reading is usually done in school and for homework. New groups are formed during each new Literature Circle block.

The groups meet weekly to discuss the book during a Language Arts practice period and depending on the abilities of the students, the discussion themes either come from the teacher and/or the students. Students take turns leading the discussions. Each leader comes to the group with a discussion ‘starter’ question. (These could be approved in advance by the teacher.) These sessions tend to be quite lively with all students engaged. The teacher moves from group to group, observing, listening and facilitating where needed. The conversations may deviate from the book to related topics but the teacher can help the students learn how to guide themselves back to the book.

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