Determining the Benefits of Implementing Literature Circles into a Secondary Language Arts Classroom

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Abstract

Nineteen seventh-grade language arts students enrolled in a small Midwestern school participated in the study. Seven participants were female and twelve participants were male. The purpose of the study was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circle discussion groups into a secondary language arts classroom. Benefits included an increase in the students' utilization of comprehension strategies along with an improvement in comprehension test scores.
This work is dedicated to my family and friends who have shown their support in immeasurable ways. After a long and turbulent career in the airline industry, I chose to embark on a new profession in the field of education. I believe that God has tremendous plans for my future, and I only hope that I will be as effective and innovative in the classroom as many of my colleagues have demonstrated over the past few years. It has been an exhilarating adventure, and I have grown immensely during this evolving phase of my life.
Acknowledgments

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As a non-traditional student in the graduate program, I would like to thank Sally Bissell, Michelle Call and Amy Westrick in the CAP office for their encouragement and consideration to those of us in the adult education program. They are a wealth of knowledge and should be commended for their professionalism and dedication to all students.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The researcher was enrolled in a graduate program to obtain his initial teaching licensure. As a practicing substitute teacher, the researcher was concerned with the lack of motivation being demonstrated among students in the area of reading. Many students had not completed their reading assignments because they had little or no interest in the reading selections which had been assigned. Some students had experienced difficulties concerning reading comprehension while others had exhibited very little desire to participate in classroom literature discussions. A review of the literature indicated that literature circles may have encouraged student participation within a student-centered collaborative learning group. In addition, the literature review recognized a number of benefits which were directly related to the implementation of literature circles in various classrooms. The researcher’s goal was to execute a teaching strategy that would motivate students to read as well as engage them in a positive learning environment.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this project was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom. The research questions were:

1. How did the professional literature reviewed define literature circles?
2. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the advantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?
3. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the disadvantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary literature arts classroom?
4. What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into a secondary language arts classroom?
Justification

This research project was conducted to determine whether there were any benefits to implementing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom. The researcher wanted to utilize a group discussion strategy, such as a literature circle, to create a more productive and engaging learning atmosphere for language arts students. The researcher also wanted to discover a way to get students more interested in reading. Furthermore, the researcher wanted to determine whether the students would become more motivated to read in a less-structured, student-centered reading environment. In addition, the results of this research might encourage other language arts teachers to pursue the implementation of literature circles as a means of providing a more productive learning environment for their students.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this project, the following definitions were used:

- **Collaborative learning**- A learning strategy in which students on different learning levels share knowledge with one another.

- **Group discussion strategy**- A cooperative learning strategy which utilizes small group environments to further student learning.

- **Literature circle**- Student-centered reading groups that consist of at least two members.

- **Productive learning environment**- A learning situation that generates enhanced learning skills, improves reading comprehension and produces positive social interactions.
• **Secondary classroom**- A classroom environment that consists of students between grades seven and twelve.

• **Student-centered**- A student-lead activity in which students teach information to one another.

*Limitations and Appropriate Use of Results*

This project was conducted in a small, rural Midwestern school as part of the researcher’s student teaching requirement. The sample size for this research project consisted of 19 secondary language arts students. The research was limited to one group of students and it was conducted over a nine week period. The socio-economic status of the group ranged from lower-middle class to middle class, and the gender ratio was seven girls and twelve boys—all Caucasian. Due to the limited time period, the rural setting and the minimal teaching experience of the researcher, the results may not be generalized into other classroom settings.
Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom. The research questions were:

1. How did the professional literature reviewed define literature circles?
2. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the advantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?
3. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the disadvantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?
4. What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into a secondary language arts classroom?

Research Question #1: How did the professional literature reviewed define literature circles?

To answer the first research question, a review of literature was conducted. The researchers who originated the term, Harste, Short and Burke (1988), referred to literature circles as a reading strategy in which informal discussions were organized into stages of analyzing literature. Tompkins, (as cited by Pate-Moulton, Klages, Erickson & Conforti, 2004), identified literature circles as small literature discussion groups that met on a regular basis. Tompkins went on to explain that the student-led groups were focused on discussions which asked open-ended questions in order to connect readers with their reading assignments. Blum, Lipsett and Yocom (2002) characterized literature circles as a type of literary engagement that motivated students to read. They proposed that once
the material had been read, the students would summarize what they had determined to be the most important aspects of the literature.

Through the review of literature several variations of incorporating reading material into literature circles were identified. According to Stein and Beed (2004), literature circles had provided an ideal environment in which students shared what was interesting to them in the books that they had chosen to read. Some literature circles consisted of students who had read the same books while other groups had read different books dealing with the same theme or topic (Stringer, Reynolds & Simpson, 2003). Burns (1998) pointed out that reading materials which were connected by a theme or a particular issue could be beneficial within a literature circle, and Harste et al., (1988) added that various works by the same author could produce very successful discussions within the small groups.

In addition, Burns (1998) explained the importance of assigning roles within a literature circle setting. She suggested that some type of organization within the small discussion groups allowed the students more opportunities to get involved. She noted that those assigned roles often consisted of such titles as the Discussion Director, the Vocabulary Enricher, the Passage Picker, the Illustrator and the Quotation Chooser. Daniels and Zemelman (2004) concurred that the use of assigned roles often assisted students with reading comprehension. They asserted that the purpose of using designated roles was to familiarize students with various comprehension building skills and strategies which would better prepare them for literary discussions.

Literature circles, as described by Daniels and Zemelman (2004), incorporated a variety of features which created more supportive, conscientious and enjoyable classroom
settings. Some of these features, as indicated by Burns (1998), were student’s choice of reading material, student-centered small discussion groups, adequate class time for reading and discussion groups made up of students with varying levels of communication skills. In addition, Day et al. (2002) added that literature circles promoted opportunities for classroom discussions while they also provided a more relaxed environment and a more supportive learning atmosphere.

A review of the literature established that social interaction was a common theme regarding literature circles. Burns (1998) stated that social interaction was a key component to the reading strategy’s success, and Blum et al. (2002) identified literature circles as having motivated students to read as well as to share their ideas concerning the literature with other students. King (2001) noted that many students negotiated within a group to construct a common meaning of the text and that their contributions were viewed as being equally important. Furthermore, Daniels and Zemelman (2004) emphasized that literature circles were composed of temporary groups of students who were all reading the same literature for the purpose of discussing material in a small group setting.

In summary, a review of the professional literature revealed that literature circles were a collaborative learning strategy which consisted of a variety of elements. Assigned roles within literature circles, motivational strategies, and successful social interaction all contributed to an ideal literature circle environment. Student interaction enabled thought provoking discussions and higher levels of thinking which created a successful learning atmosphere. In addition, successful comprehension in reading, as explained by Blum et al. (2002), involved the students’ abilities to utilize various learning techniques.
Literature circles integrated social interaction which helped to improve the student’s comprehension through questioning, analyzing and summarizing of literature and other reading material. As Burns (1998) concluded, social interaction was the key element found to be of critical importance to a literature circle’s success.

**Research Question #2:** According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the advantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?

To answer the second research question, a review of the literature was conducted. According to the professional literature reviewed, there were several key advantages associated with implementing literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom. The researcher focused on three major benefits and they included: (1) improved student’s self-esteem; (2) integrated more positive learning environments; and (3) increased reading motivation among the students.

**Improved Self-Esteem.**

Stringer et al. (2003) indicated that a student’s lack of reading skills may have directly affected his or her self-esteem. Many researchers stated that literature circles were beneficial in providing students with an improved self-esteem, a higher level of thinking skills and an increased appreciation for reading (Stein & Beed, 2004; Stringer, Reynolds & Simpson, 2003; Pate-Moulton et al., 2004). The research indicated that low levels of self-esteem may have played a significant role in the way some students approached learning activities. Daniels and Zemelman (2004) suggested that students who gained confidence within their small groups became more involved and participated at higher levels. Field, Hoffman and Posch (as cited in Blum et al., 2002) stated that self-
determination supported better decision making skills, increased problem solving techniques and promoted self-evaluation. They noted that improved self-esteem correlated with success in the classroom and that a student’s improved self-perception was a direct consequence of having become more confident and involved within a literature circle setting.

Another self-esteem building benefit of implementing literature circles into a secondary arts classroom, according to Boardman Moen (2005), was that it allowed students of all reading levels and abilities to participate in a student-centered literacy experience. Stringer et al. (2003) noted that the qualitative research advocated that literature circles created a higher level of self-esteem among students who engaged in small discussion groups. In addition, Lampe and Rooze (as cited by Stringer et al., 2003) stated that student achievement and increased levels of self-esteem may have resulted from cooperative learning strategies such as those experienced in literature circles.

Provided a Positive Learning Environment.

Many researchers reported that the implementation of literature circles had provided a more positive learning atmosphere in which students learned to become highly independent, conscientious and responsible readers (Brabham & Villaume, 2000; Stien & Beed, 2004; Burns, 1998). Brabham and Villaume (2000) stated that many proficient readers take ownership of their reading and that they build connotation within the text. They went on to explain that literature circles were responsible for promoting active and thoughtful approaches toward reading.

Brabham and Villaume (2000) proposed that literature circle discussions encouraged students to create more advanced individual insights and analysis of literary
material. Small group conversations, according to Burns (1998), contributed to an increase in reader comprehension which generated more complex thoughts. She noted that verbalizing content and listening to other students’ perspectives created a richer learning experience. Tompkins (as cited in Pate-Moulton et al., 2004) established the importance of asking open-ended questions among the members of a discussion group as a means of getting them to connect with the material. Tompkins also emphasized that students who had participated in literature circles might be more likely to read and that they might have more opportunities to think in a more critical and creative manner.

**Increased Reader Motivation.**

The researcher noticed that motivation was a very common topic among the literature that was reviewed. Day et al. (2002) stated that literature circles motivated students to read because talking about what they had learned was fun. Some researchers connected motivational strategies with reading and literary comprehension (Burns, 1998; Day et al., 2002). They explained that a relaxed classroom climate where talking was encouraged created a positive attitude among the members of the discussion groups. Burns (1998) also proposed that literature circles provided a varied routine of daily instruction which created a more interesting classroom. Along with this, Blum et al. (2002) concluded that literature circles had provided opportunities for students to improve their reading skills as well as their literary comprehension. That sense of accomplishment helped to build the students’ self-esteem and in return many of the students were motivated to continue participating in the small group discussions.

In summary, the literature review concluded that there were many positive aspects to incorporating literature circles into a secondary literature arts classroom. An improved
self-esteem, a positive learning environment and a higher level of motivation were all reported to contribute to increased reader comprehension. Through a review of the literature, it was confirmed that most literature circles generated a learning atmosphere in which students could learn from one another. Burns (1998) indicated that social interaction was essential to the successful integration of literature circles. Furthermore, Brabham and Villaume (2000) determined that students who participated in engaged learning strategies did so at higher levels once they took ownership of their own learning. They stated that “Readers come together to build conversational skills for talking about texts in enlightening, personal, and thoughtful ways” (pg. 279).

Research Question #3: According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the disadvantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?

To answer the third research question, a review of the literature was conducted. The research revealed that not all literature groups were successful in achieving their desired goals. Personality clashes, varying levels of student abilities and staying on task were the most common reasons given for failure within the discussion groups. Day et al. (2002) noted that some literature circles required more guidance from the facilitator in order for the group to be successful. They devised a list of guidelines with the hopes of keeping the students focused on the literature while at the same time eliminating rude and egotistical comments from members within the group. Daniels (2002) discussed group behavior and the dynamics involved in creating productive, thought-provoking discussion groups. He noted that there were some expected as well as controllable elements which
could be manipulated by the instructor. According to Daniels (2002), a more positive
discussion group environment could be produced with the proper intervention.

Additionally, Daniels (2002) reported on some common dilemmas which he
found to be most prevalent among a number of students within struggling literature
circles. One of the main problems he encountered in faltering discussion groups was that
some students were being distracted by lower levels of thinking and shallow discussions.
Daniels (2002) continued that some students refused to participate in the group
discussions while other groups were confronted with conversations which were
dominated by one or two group members.

According to the literature reviewed, many researchers identified difficulties
which revolved around the students' lack of preparedness, their lack of reading
proficiency and their inability to think and question at elevated levels (Brabham et al.,
2000; Burns, 1998; Daniels, 2002). One of the main reasons that students chose not to
participate in group discussions, according to Daniels (2002), was that they were not
motivated by the reading material. He suggested that educators monitor the reading
selections closely to make certain that the assignments had been completed and that the
comprehension level had been met.

Student reading proficiency, according to Brabham et al. (2000), was increased in
some literature circles through adjustments of learning scaffolds. They suggested that
students with lower reading abilities had benefited from those supportive learning
techniques and that as the students' reading abilities improved, the scaffolds were
eventually eliminated. Harste et al. (1988) stated that in order for students to become
proficient readers they had to experience many types of reading other than literature.
They suggested that newspapers, magazines, maps and other sources of information be available to students so that their reading skills could be further improved.

However, not all dysfunctions in literature circles could be attributed to the students alone. As Daniels (2002) pointed out, the most common problem that teachers had encountered as they implemented literature circles into their classrooms was their own lack of patience. He suggested that students needed time to adjust to the dynamics and procedures involved in small discussion groups. Daniels (2002) went on to state that given time, most literature circles had proven to be successful because as the students adjusted to the new format, they tended to become more willing to accept responsibility and leadership roles within their small groups.

Furthermore, teachers needed to relinquish the idea that they were the exclusive educators in the classroom. Teachers needed to become facilitators as the students took on the leadership roles in the discussion groups. Harste et al. (1988) explained that students needed to make adjustments in their views of the teacher as well. By solely reproducing the thoughts of the teacher, the students would not have much success within their literature circle, concluded Harste et al. (1988). In other words, students needed the freedom to take risks in their discussions about the material, and once they developed the ability to communicate their findings within the group, their thinking strategies would be that much stronger.

In summary, the literature reviewed emphasized a number of difficulties attributed to literature circles. Student’s lack of participation as well as their inability to remain focused on the task was of major concern to some researchers; however, with guidance and practice many of the challenges associated with small discussion groups
had been transformed into positive learning experiences. According to Daniels (2002), some foreseeable problems had been monitored and controlled by the classroom instructors as the literature circles were being integrated. Additionally, teachers created ways of dealing with minor conflicts within the discussion groups, and teacher intervention assisted with many of the challenges (Day et al., 2002). Literature circles have encountered various difficulties; however, researchers have concluded that the benefits have provided many positive effects.

Research Question #4: What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into a secondary language arts classroom?

Conclusion

According to the professional literature reviewed, literature circles were comprised of many interconnected elements. Small discussion groups had many things in common, but they also had some profound differences. As a reading strategy, according to Burns (1998), literature circles had the capability of changing an entire classroom climate into a more productive, encouraging and responsible environment. Many researchers agreed that the implementation of literature circles had increased self-esteem as well as reading motivation among a majority of students in their research studies (Stein & Beed, 2004; Stringer et al., 2003; Pate-Moulton et al., 2004).

It became apparent during the review of literature that student motivation in literature circles was measured by their participation and involvement within the small discussion groups. The level of interest demonstrated by the students was believed to be a reflection of significance within the material that was being read, and comprehension was thought to be associated with reader interest along with various levels of thinking.
Daniels (2002) emphasized that interesting literature created interested readers, and Burns (1998) stressed the importance of a reader’s freedom to choose topics that interested them.

Even though some literature circles may have produced a number of ineffective attempts at engaging students in successful group discussions, the long term benefits of producing readers with increased levels of critical and creative thinking are well worth the challenge (Pate-Moulton et al., 2004). Students have profited from literature circles in other areas of the curriculum as well, and as Daniels (2002) pointed out, literature circles have often assisted educators in dealing with disaffected and unproductive students in the classroom. Following a review of the professional literature it was concluded that literature circles have led to elevated levels of thinking, increased social skills and improved reader comprehension.
Chapter III: Methods and Procedures

The purpose of this project was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom. The research questions were:

1. How did the professional literature reviewed define literature circles?
2. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the advantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?
3. According to the professional literature reviewed, what were the disadvantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary literature arts classroom?
4. What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into a secondary language arts classroom?

Participants

Nineteen seventh-grade students participated in this study. Students were enrolled in a secondary language arts classroom, in a small, rural Midwestern school. Seven participants were female and twelve participants were male.

Treatment/Intervention

The intervention for this project was the implementation of literature circles. Included with the literature circles were teacher-led discussion and the introduction of heuristic prompts. These Discussion Heuristic Prompts were used to actively engage the students in more comprehensive literature discussions. The professional literature stated that social interaction had assisted with students' comprehension of text material through the questioning, analyzing and summarizing of literary texts. In addition, participation in literature circles inspired students to engage in more critical and creative thinking due in part to the cooperative learning atmosphere (Burns, 1998; Day et al., 2002).
Literature circles were introduced to the students on January 23. For their homework assignment, the students were instructed to complete the assigned short story from the literature textbook. On the following day the students were randomly divided into small cooperative groups. Once their desks were arranged into separate clusters, and with minimal direct instruction, they were encouraged to begin informally discussing the literature assignment from the night before. A majority of the students were confused and unclear as to how to complete the task that they were being asked to perform. The researcher placed a list of three open-ended questions from the Discussion Heuristic Prompts on the overhead projector which provided a focus for the small group discussions. These prompts included a variety of questions that engaged the students into discussing various aspects of the literature assignment. One of the prompts asked the students to describe the main character’s feelings and to explain why she might have felt that way. Another prompt instructed the students to describe an experience of prejudice that they had encountered or had heard about. (See appendix E).

Upon completion of their first informal literature discussion, the researcher inquired as to how the students perceived the informal discussions in which they had just participated. Most of their comments included statements about the initial confusion and lack of participation among some members of their groups. A majority of the students agreed that the addition of the Discussion Heuristic Prompts had provided them with a focal point for discussion and that the interaction within the small groups had increased when the prompts were utilized. The researcher then introduced the students to the four designated roles and accompanying task sheets that would be implemented during the literature circles on the following day.
The students were randomly assigned a role within their literature circle grouping. The designated roles consisted of the Discussion Director, the Connector, the Word Wizard and the Passage Picker. Each role was accompanied by a task sheet which explained the duties that the student would have to perform for that particular role in the literature circle. The task sheets were used to organize the student-led group discussions in order to engage the students in various aspects of literary discussions.

One of the roles, the Discussion Director, was responsible for developing a list of at least three open ended questions that were designed to create a more in-depth conversation about the reading assignment. The task sheet that accompanied this role included an evaluation form that the Discussion Director used to rate individual students’ performances during the literature circle discussion. Another task performed by the Discussion Director was to make predictions of the next reading assignment as well as to report on what the group had learned on that particular day. (See appendix G).

Another role in the literature circle, the Connector, required the student to find connections between the book and the world outside. The Connector’s task sheet instructed the student to write a few paragraphs explaining the connections that were made and to share them with the group. These connections included those from the student’s own life, from other people, similar event in history, or other books on the same topic. (See appendix H).

The role of the Word Wizard included finding at least five special or interesting words from the text. The Word Wizard’s task sheet contained instructions for selecting words for the small group discussion as well as a chart that was to be used to record the information pertaining to the selected words. The student was asked to provide a written
explanation stating why each word had been chosen. The Word Wizard used the task sheet during the group discussion to talk about how the words fit into the story and to discuss whether or not another word might have been used in its place. (See appendix I).

The role of the Passage Picker included such tasks as selecting and reading aloud sections from the text and discussing why these sections were chosen. These passages could be descriptive, scary, interesting, important or just a well-liked part of the story. The Passage Picker’s task sheet included a chart to record where the passage was found and why the student chose it for the group discussion. (See appendix J).

The students were divided into five groups. Four of the groups consisted of four members and one group consisted of three members. The researcher distributed the task sheets to the group members. The researcher orally read the directions for each of the task sheets and answered any student questions. The task sheets were used to facilitate the literature circle procedure.

For each subsequent reading assignment, the students were assigned different roles within their literature circles so that each student could experience the various tasks included in the small group discussions. This rotation helped the students identify any strengths or weaknesses they may have had within the small discussion group setting.

For the first two weeks, the students met in their literature circles for twenty minutes each day. At the beginning of the class period, the researcher wrote three heuristic prompts on the overhead projector in order to facilitate the small group discussions and to guide them toward more in-depth conversations. These prompts consisted of open-ended questions which were designed to engage the students in conversations about the text and to redirect them when they became unfocused.
On randomly selected days, the researcher instructed the students to open their Double-Entry Journals and respond to the written prompts located on the overhead projector. These prompts were designed by the researcher to encourage the students to reflect on their group meeting and to elaborate on the positive and negative aspects of the group interaction. One prompt asked the students to write down at least one positive interaction that occurred in that day’s literature circle discussion. Another prompt asked the students to reflect and write down any problems that they had witnessed during that day’s group discussion. The purpose of this writing exercise was to identify a range of difficulties within each group to facilitate the process. (See appendix F).

The seventh grade literature textbook was used for each of the cooperative group reading assignments. The text contained activities that prompted summarization and critical thinking skills, including connecting the literature to one’s personal life, and extending interpretations of the text. The text was used during the cooperative reading time.

Instruments/Protocols

Various instruments and protocols were utilized to collect data in order to answer question #4: What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into a secondary language arts classroom? The data were collected using three instruments devised by the researcher. They were the Daily Observation Checklist, Comprehension Tests and Student Literature Circle Surveys.

Daily Observation Checklist

The first instrument used for data collection was the Daily Observation Checklist. It was developed in part with information introduced by Day et al. (2002), and it was
used by the researcher to score the level of critical thinking strategies used by members of each literature circle group. According to Day, students demonstrate growth and progress in reading by demonstrating the use of various strategies during group discussions. The strategies listed on the Daily Observation Checklist included; formulating appropriate and open-ended questions, articulating confusion, interpreting text by using evidence to support opinions, making inferences, connections, and predictions, referring to literary elements, identifying complexity and considering ideas of other group members. The Daily Observation Checklist was used by the researcher to record the number of times each student used each of the seven strategies listed on the checklist. A score of “3” indicated that the student had demonstrated a high level use by successfully using the strategy at least twice during the observation. A score of “2” indicated a mid-level use of the strategy by successfully using it at least once, and a score of “1” signified that the student had demonstrated a low level use of the strategy because the student had not yet demonstrated successful use of the stated strategy. (See appendix A).

Comprehension Tests

The second instrument used to collect the data was the comprehension test. A written test was administered at the completion of each literature assignments. The test consisted of three questions that the researcher developed to determine how well the students were able to express their understanding of the text. The test was also used to assess the successful utilization of two of the comprehension skills which the students learned while participating in literature circle discussions. For example, one question focused on why the narrator had such strong feelings for the main character while another
asked the students to compare the sinking of the Titanic with a more recent disaster. The students were asked to answer the question and to support the answer by giving details from the text. They were also instructed to make personal connections with the text to demonstrate comprehension of the literature. (See appendix B).

Upon completion of the comprehension tests, the researcher used the Comprehension Test Scoring Rubric to score the individual tests. The questions were designed so that each answer had to be accompanied by an example from the text as well as an explanation to demonstrate the student’s knowledge of the material. The questions were intended to persuade the students to utilize two of the strategies listed on the Daily Observation Checklist. The researcher assessed how successfully the students were able to use evidence or examples from the text to support their answers. He also assessed how well the students were able to use personal experiences to make connections with the literature. The Comprehension Test Scoring Rubric consisted of a chart with scores ranging from 0 to 3. A score of “3” represented that the question was answered, an example from the text was used to support the answer, and a connection was used to further explain the answer. A score of “2” signified that only two of the three criteria had been met, and a score of “1” indicated that only one of the criteria had been met. A “0” meant that the student had not answered the question. (See appendix C).

Student Literature Circle Survey

The third instrument used by the researcher was the Student Literature Circle Survey. According to Day et al. (2002), many students were motivated to read because discussing reading material in a group setting was engaging and enjoyable. Burns (1998) stated that literature circles provided the students with a sense of control over a
part of their learning and this feeling motivated many reluctant readers to participate in the small discussion groups.

Intrinsic motivation had been associated with students’ higher educational achievement as well as their personal enjoyment. According to Stein et al., students become empowered through literature circles, and they created their own destinations during the reading process. Many times when students are engaged in an activity, such as a literature circle discussion, they do so because they enjoy participating in that type of learning atmosphere and they consider themselves to be in control of their own learning. The literature reviewed stated that social interaction was a key component regarding literature circles and that they were viewed by many students as being enjoyable which increased their motivation to participate (Day et al. 2002).

The researcher developed the Student Literature Circle Survey to assess the level of enjoyment experienced by the members of the small discussion groups. It was also utilized to evaluate whether or not the students perceived the literature circle discussions as being linked to their overall comprehension of the literature assignments.

The Student Literature Circle Survey contained five statements which included; “The discussion group helped me understand the story better,” “Participating in a discussion group makes the story easier to understand,” “I enjoy literature circles because I learn more when I discuss the story in a small group,” “I understand literature better when I read independently,” and “Discussing literature in a group allows me to learn from others.”

The students were instructed to respond to each of the five statements on a scale of one to five. A “1” represented that the student strongly agreed with the statement, a
“2” signified that the student somewhat agreed with the statement, a “3” meant that the student had no opinion of the statement, a “4” represented that the student somewhat disagreed with the statement and a “5” meant that the student strongly disagree with the statement. Four of the statements required the students to reflect on their perceived comprehension due to participating in a literature circle. The other statement pertained to their personal enjoyment of the discussion group experience. (See appendix D).

**Procedures**

Prior to the beginning of the researcher’s student teaching assignment, he met with the cooperating teacher to discuss the details of the project. He provided her with the professional literature pertaining to the implementation of literature circles into the language arts classroom. A letter explaining the project was composed by the researcher and sent home with each of the students involved in the trial. The letter contained a consent form to be used by those parents who did not wish to have their children photographed during the instructional taping of the researcher. (See appendix K).

**Daily Observation Checklist**

Through direct instruction, the researcher explained to the students the process and goals of implementing literature circles into the seventh grade language arts classroom. Referring to the Daily Observation Checklist, the researcher shared with his students the seven comprehension strategies that would be utilized by the researcher to assess the student observations during the literature circle intervention.

During the small group discussions, the researcher used the checklist to tally the number of times a particular student demonstrated the successful use of the listed strategies. A student who demonstrated the successful use of the stated comprehension
strategy at least twice during the observation received a score of “3.” Students who used
the stated strategy only once received a score of “2” while those students who had
attempted the use of a particular strategy, but were unsuccessful, received a score of “1.”

Once a week the researcher tallied the checklists and issued scores for each
student. The researcher completed a total of three individual student observations during
the seven-week trial period. (See appendix A.)

Comprehension Tests

For each of the reading assignments, the students engaged in literature circle
discussions at least twice during the week. At the completion of each literature
assignment, the researcher distributed a written test that was to be completed by each
student. The researcher utilized the Comprehension Tests to assess how well the
students’ articulated their understanding of the material. The students were instructed to
answer the three questions, give examples from the literature to support their answers,
and to make personal connections with the text. Once completed, the researcher
collected the tests. The Comprehension Test Scoring Rubric was used by the researcher
to evaluate and score the tests. (See appendix C).

Student Literature Circle Survey

The researcher provided each student with a Student Literature Circle Survey
upon the completion of each Comprehension test. This survey was used by the
researcher to evaluate the students’ perceptions about the literature circle intervention.
According to the literature reviewed, cooperative learning and enjoyment were two key
factors in the successful implementation of literature circles. The researcher wanted to
determine whether or not the students regarded the small group discussions as being
pleasurable. He also wanted to verify whether or not the students considered the cooperative learning activity as being responsible for increasing their reading comprehension skills.

**Timeline**

The researcher began meeting with his mentor during the first week of January. The data collection instruments were developed prior to the implementation of the project. The project was introduced during the third week of January and the researcher began collecting data during the last week in January. He continued to collect the data through the second week in March. Upon completion of the trial period, the researcher began analyzing the data collected.

**Data Analysis**

Daily Observation Checklist

The researcher analyzed and recorded the information from the Daily Observation Checklist which was collected while the students participated in literature circles for each of the three literature assignments. The researcher rated each student’s ability to demonstrate the successful use of various comprehension strategies. The researcher counted the number of times a particular student used each of the strategies and rated his or her level of usage as being high-level, mid-level or low-level. Using a bar graph, a comparison was made to determine if the students had improved in successfully demonstrating the use of each of the seven comprehension strategies listed on the checklist during the trial period. (See appendix A).
Comprehension Tests

The researcher scored the tests using the Comprehension Test Scoring Rubric. Once the scores were recorded, the researcher created a bar graph to display the average classroom scores for each of the three comprehension tests. This data provided the researcher with information concerning how well the class had comprehended the material. It also provided information on the students’ successful utilization of the comprehension skills learned during the literature circle intervention. (See appendixes B and C).

Student Literature Circle Survey

Upon completion of each of the three literature comprehension tests, the researcher administered a Student Literature Circle Survey. Using a bar graph, the researcher recorded the students’ responses to each of the five statements on the survey. The graph was used to compare the students’ opinions regarding the literature circle treatment during the trial period. (See appendix D).

Data collection methods were designed and the information was collected in order to answer the research question #4: What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into the secondary language arts classroom? The methods and instruments used for this project provided the information to develop the results. Chapter IV describes and explains the results.
Chapter IV Results

The purpose of this study was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom. The researcher wanted to determine the student’s comprehension level of text material while participating in small group discussions such as a literature circle. He also wanted to discover whether or not the students were motivated to read the assignments and actively participate in the small group discussions due to the implementation of these literature circles.

The review of the research literature provided evidence that literature circles had, indeed, shown a number of advantages that could be attributed to the implementation of literature circles in various classroom settings. Among the benefits attributed to the introduction of literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom were the following: increased reading appreciation, higher level thinking skills and improved self-esteem (Stein & Beed, 2004; Stringer, Reynolds & Simpson, 2003; Pate-Moulton et al., 2004). Other benefits included a positive learning environment in which students learned to become independent, conscientious and responsible readers (Brabham & Villaume, 2000; Stein & Beed, 2004; Burns, 1998). Increased reader motivation and literary comprehension were also noted by some researchers as being connected to the integration of literature circles (Burns, 1998; Day et al., 2002).

Through the review of literature the researcher identified prompts and questions upon which he could evaluate how successfully the students demonstrated their understanding of the text material. He also formulated a questionnaire to examine how well the students enjoyed the literature circle intervention as well as their perception of how much the intervention improved their reading comprehension.
Instruments and procedures were developed to gather data to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom. Data collection instruments included the Daily Observation Checklist, Comprehension Test Scores and Literature Circle Surveys.

**Daily Observation Checklist**

The researcher observed individual students as they participated in small literature circle discussion groups. He rated individual students on their frequency of using each of seven stated reading comprehension strategies. High-level use of the strategy indicated that the student had successfully used the comprehension strategy two or more times. Mid-level use of the strategy indicated that the student had successfully demonstrated the use of the stated strategy only once during the group discussion. Low-level use of the strategy signified that the student had attempted to use the stated strategy but was unsuccessful and required redirection.

The Daily Observation Checklist consisted of seven statements. The first statement was used by the researcher to determine how effectively an individual student formulated appropriate and open-ended questions. It read, “Student formulates appropriate and open-ended questions.” Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student asked appropriate and open-ended questions during the small group discussion. Figure 1 shows a comparison of the number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of formulating appropriate and open-ended questions for each of the three texts.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of formulating appropriate and open-ended questions among three short story texts

Figure 1. Number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of formulating appropriate and open-ended questions for each of the three texts.

The data confirmed that the students’ use of appropriate and open-ended questions had increased over the duration of the trial period. The researcher observed that all 19 students had successfully used appropriate or open-ended questions while participating in literature circles during the third and final reading assignment.

The second statement on the Daily Observation Checklist was used to determine how often a student was able to articulate confusion. The statement read, “Student articulates confusion.” Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student successfully stated confusion during the small group discussion. Figure 2 shows a comparison of the number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of articulating confusion during the small group literature discussion.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of articulating confusion among three short story texts

![Bar Chart]

**Figure 2.** Number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of articulating confusion for each of the three texts.

The data confirmed an increase in the number of students who demonstrated their ability to articulate confusion. It was also noted that the low-level use of this comprehension strategy had decreased during the trial period.

The third statement on the Daily Observation Checklist was used to determine how well a student was able to interpret the text using evidence and examples from the text to support opinions and evaluations. The third statement read, “Student interprets text by using evidence/examples to support opinions/evaluations.” Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student used evidence or examples from the text to support an opinion or evaluation. Figure 3 shows a comparison of the number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of using evidence and examples from the text to support an opinion or evaluation.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of using evidence and examples from the texts to support opinions and evaluations when interpreting the three short story texts

![Bar chart comparing levels of evidence use across three stories](image)

Figure 3. Number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of using evidence and examples from the text to support opinions and evaluations when interpreting the reading material for each of the three texts.

The data confirmed an increase in the number of students who demonstrated higher-level use of using evidence and examples to support their opinions and evaluations of the text.

The fourth statement on the Daily Observation Checklist was used to determine the number of times a student used personal experiences to connect with the text, make inferences, make predictions and use foreshadowing. The fourth statement read, "Student uses personal experience to connect with the text, make inferences, predict and use foreshadowing." Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student demonstrated the use of personal experiences to connect with the text, to make inferences, to predict and to use foreshadowing. Figure 4 shows a comparison of the number of students who successfully demonstrated high, medium and low levels of using personal experiences to make connections with the text, to make inferences, to predict and to use foreshadowing.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of making connections, inferences, predictions and foreshadowing when discussing the three short story texts

![Bar chart showing comparison of students' comprehension levels across three stories.]

Figure 4. Number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of making personal connections, making inferences, making predictions and using foreshadowing when discussing each of the three texts.

The data confirmed an increase in the number of students who used personal experiences to connect with the text, make inferences, make predictions and use foreshadowing while discussing the reading text. The data also showed a decline in the number of students who used low-level use of this comprehension strategy.

The fifth statement on the Daily Observation Checklist was used to determine the number of times a student considered the ideas of other students while considering conflicting evidence. The fifth statement read, “Student considers ideas of other students and weighs conflicting evidence.” Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student considered the ideas of other students and weighed conflicting evidence. Figure 5 shows a comparison of the number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of considering other students’ ideas and weighing conflicting evidence.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of considering ideas of other students and conflicting evidence while discussing the text

Figure 5. Number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of considering ideas of other students along with conflicting evidence for each of the texts.

The data observed confirmed that students had increased their willingness to consider other students’ ideas as well as pondering conflicting evidence presented by other members of the group. The data also showed that the number of students who used low-levels of this strategy had decreased over the trial period.

The sixth statement on the Daily Observation Checklist was used by the researcher to determine the number of times a student demonstrated complexity while answering questions about the text. The sixth statement read, “Student identifies complexity while answering questions (looks for more then one explanation or answer).” Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student demonstrated complexity while answering a question during the small group discussion. Figure 6 shows a comparison of the number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of identifying complexity while answering questions in the group discussion.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of identifying complexity while discussing the three short stories

![Bar chart showing comparison of students' ability to identify complexity](image)

**Figure 6.** Number of students who demonstrated the ability to identify complexity when answering questions for each of the three texts.

The data observed confirms that the number of students who demonstrated the ability to identify complexity in the text increased while participating in literature circles.

The seventh statement on the Daily Observation Checklist was used by the researcher to determine how many times a student referred to literary elements during the small group discussion. The seventh statement read, “Student refers to literary elements (characters, setting, mood, and theme) during group discussion.” Observations were scored by counting the number of times a student referred to literary elements during the small group discussion. Figure 7 shows a comparison of the number of students who demonstrated high, medium and low levels of referring to literary elements during the group discussion.
Comparison of students who demonstrated various levels of using literary elements while discussing the three short stories

![Bar chart showing the number of students who demonstrated different levels of using literary elements in discussions.](chart.png)

*Figure 7. Number of students who demonstrated the ability to refer to literary elements such as characters, setting, mood and theme during literature circle discussions.*

The data confirmed that students' use of discussing literary elements had increased dramatically during the trial period. The data also showed that the number of students who demonstrated low-level use of this comprehension strategy had declined during the trial period.

Comprehension Test Scores

The researcher administered comprehension tests at the completion of each of the three short story units. Each of the comprehension tests consisted of three questions. A comprehension test scoring rubric was used to score the comprehension tests. The score reflected how successfully a student answered the question, whether or not an example from the text was used as evidence for the answer, and whether or not the student made a personal connection to the text.

The tests were scored and recorded. A score of “3” indicated that the student had answered the question correctly, gave an example from the text to support their answer and made a personal connection with the text. A score of “2” indicated that the student had only met two of the criteria. A score of “1” indicated that the student had
successfully met only one of the criteria and a score of “0” meant that the student failed to meet any of the three criteria.

Figure 8 shows the comparison of students’ comprehension test scores for each of the three reading texts during the implementation of literature circles. The scores for each story were combined and then divided by the number of students in the class to determine a class average.

![Comparison of students' comprehension test scores during the implementation of Literature Circles](image)

Figure 8. Comparison of students’ comprehension scores during the implementation of literature circles for the three short story texts.

The data confirmed that students’ test scores increased over the eight week trial period. The average classroom test score upon the completion of the first reading assignment was 79 percent. The students’ classroom test score average increased to 85 percent for the second reading assignment and the score increased to 86 percent for the third reading assignment.
Student Literature Circle Survey

The Student Literature Circle Survey was used by the researcher to score individual responses to five questions pertaining to the implementation of literature circles. The questions were developed to determine how well the students liked the literature circle treatment and to determine if they believed that the small group discussions had increased their reading comprehension. See appendix D.

The first question asked the students to respond to the statement, “The discussion group helped me understand the story better.” Figure 9 shows a comparison of the students’ response among each of the three reading assignments.

![Comparison of responses to question #1 on the Student Literature Circle Survey](image)

**Figure 9.** Student responses to survey question #1: The discussion group helped me to understand the story better.

The data confirmed that the majority of students somewhat agreed that literature circle discussions helped them comprehend the reading text. During the trial period, only one student strongly disagreed that the group discussion had helped with reading comprehension.
The second question on the Student Literature Circle Survey asked the students to respond to the statement, “Participating in a discussion group makes the story easier to understand.” Figure 10 shows a comparison of the students’ responses among the three reading assignments.

**Comparison of responses to question #2 on the Student Literature Circle Survey**

![Bar chart showing responses to question #2]

*Figure 10. Student responses to survey question #2: Participating in a discussion group makes the story easier to understand.*

The data confirmed the majority of students somewhat agreed that participating in literature circle discussion groups had made the story easier to understand. There was an overwhelming increase of students who strongly agreed for story number three that literature circles made the story easier to comprehend.

The third statement on the Student Literature Circle Survey asked the students to respond to the statement, “I enjoy literature circles because I learn more when I discuss the story in a small group.” Figure 11 shows a comparison of the students’ responses among the three reading assignments.
Comparison of responses to question #3 on the Student Literature Circle Survey

Figure 11. Student responses to survey question #3: *I enjoy literature circles because I learn more when I discuss the story in a small group.*

The data showed that the students' responses were fairly equal for the first reading assignment. The second and third reading assignments indicated that the majority of students agreed that they had enjoyed discussing literature in a group setting because they believed that they learned more in this learning environment.

The fourth statement on the Student Literature Circle Survey asked the students to respond to the statement, "I understand literature better when I read independently."

Figure 12 shows a comparison of the students' responses among the three reading assignments.
The students’ responses for the first two stories indicated that they agreed that they comprehended the literature while reading independently. However, the majority of students somewhat disagreed with this statement for the third reading assignment.

The fifth statement on the Student Literature Circle Survey asked the students to respond to the statement, “Discussing literature in a group allows me to learn from others.” Figure 13 shows a comparison of the students’ responses among the three assigned reading texts.

Figure 12. Student responses to survey question #4: I understand literature better when I read independently.

Figure 13. Student responses to survey question #5: Discussing literature in a group allows me to learn from others.
The data showed that the majority of students somewhat agreed that they had learned from other students while discussing literature in a literature circle setting.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom. The data collection methods used for this project were the Daily Observation Checklist, the Comprehension Test Scores and the Student Literature Circle Survey. Students' use of the seven comprehension strategies increased over the trial period. The majority of students responded that they believed literature circles had indeed helped with reading comprehension. They also reported that they were motivated to participate in the small discussion groups due to their enjoyment of the social interaction.
Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this project was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom. The research questions were:

1. How did the professional literature define literature circles?

2. According to the professional literature, what were the advantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary language arts classroom?

3. According to the professional literature, what were the disadvantages of utilizing literature circles in a secondary literature arts classroom?

4. What benefits occurred when literature circles were implemented into a secondary language arts classroom?

Meaning of Findings

The research instruments used to gather the data for the project were the Daily Observation Checklist, the Comprehension Tests and the Student Literature Circle Surveys. It was determined that the introduction of literature circles into the secondary language arts classroom had resulted in some positive benefits.

The researcher noted that the students’ interest had increased and they had become more focused in the small discussion groups once the designated roles and task sheets were implemented. This was due in part to the fact that the students were not accustomed to reading the text and discussing it without teacher intervention. The Discussion Heuristic Prompts seemed to assist the students with focusing on the text while helping to redirect those students who had difficulties participating in the small group discussions.
The students in the study benefited in the following ways: there were many students who demonstrated improved self-esteem during discussion group interactions, many displayed improved levels of comprehension and the majority of students exhibited increased levels of motivation due to their enjoyment of literature circles.

The use of the Daily Observation Checklist assisted the researcher with collecting data concerning the students’ use of the seven stated comprehension strategies. During the small group discussions, the researcher was able to record various levels of use for individual students. As the use of the strategies increased, the comprehension level for the majority of the students did as well.

A key element in comprehending a reading text is one’s ability to use a variety of comprehension strategies (Blum et al., 2002). It is also important for the students to assess their understanding of the text while recognizing the strategies used to build their comprehension. Literature circles provided students with the opportunity to learn from others while they constructed their own techniques for learning.

The Daily Observation Checklist was an essential part of the researcher’s data collecting process. This tool illustrated how well each student utilized the various comprehension strategies and it assisted the researcher in planning future lessons.

The use of open-ended questions was perhaps the most crucial element within the literature circle environment. This strategy created a scaffolding effect within many of the small groups. During the trial period, most of the students showed great improvement in the quality of questions they were presenting to their group for discussion. After the first day of small group meetings, the researcher made an adjustment to the literature circle protocol. He required all students to formulate three discussion questions prior to
each small group discussion. Even though this task was originally designated for the Discussion Director role, the researcher felt the improvement assisted the students with their comprehension and it encouraged them to participate at a more in-depth level. The students usually spent most of the allotted class time discussing one another’s questions, and this promoted a higher quality of interaction among the small groups.

Another essential part of the data collecting process was the Student Literature Circle Survey. Questions 2, 3, and 4 provided some interesting insights. Over the course of the trial period, there was an increase in the number of students who strongly agreed that participating in group discussions had made the story easier to comprehend. There was also a significant increase in the number of students who stated that they have enjoyed literature circles because they believed that they learned more when discussing a text with other students.

The comprehension tests provided data which indicated that literature circle discussion groups had played a role in assisting students with improving their reading comprehension. The students’ scores showed a 7% increase during the trial period.

Summary

The purpose of this research project was to determine the benefits of implementing literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom. The research was conducted in a small, rural Midwestern community. The students used for this study were members of one seventh-grade classroom at the selected school. The class consisted of seven females and twelve males. The study was implemented over an eight week period. Upon the introduction of literature circles, the students began to discuss literary texts in a small discussion group setting. The researcher used the Daily
Observation Checklist to record individual students’ use of seven predetermined comprehension strategies. During the first reading assignment, the researcher introduced a list of Heuristic Discussion Questions. These questions were used to assist those students who required redirection within their small discussion groups. The Daily Observation Checklist was used by the researcher during each literature circle meeting, and each student was observed a minimum of three times over the course of the trial period. Comprehension tests were administered and individual scores were recorded upon the completion of each of the three assigned literary texts. The researcher provided each student with a Student Literature Circle survey at the end of each reading assignment in order to gather and record data.

The information collected and analyzed demonstrated that a majority of the students enjoyed participating in literature circle discussion groups. Most of them reported that they had, indeed, learned from other students through social interaction. They also reported that discussion groups made the reading text easier to comprehend and more enjoyable. Over the duration of the study period, a majority of students displayed improvement involving their use of the various comprehension reading strategies. Comprehension test scores also showed improvement over the eight week trial period. Based on the data collected, the researcher felt that there were benefits to implementing literature circles into a secondary language arts classroom.

Recommendations

The researcher felt that if a future study were conducted, he would allow individuals to choose their own reading selections. Some students were not interested in the reading selections and this may have created an unenthusiastic learning environment.
A few students complained that they could not work with the pre-selected groupings; however, this was due to the fact that most of these students wanted to be with their friends.

One of the researcher’s oversights was that he didn’t create a means of gathering data from the Double-Entry Journals. In a future study, a self-reporting on the effectiveness of the stated comprehension strategies would be useful.

Conclusion

This project demonstrated the importance of retaining involvement in order to keep students engaged in the learning process. A positive learning environment may assist with improving a student’s self esteem which may in turn help to create reader motivation and increased reader comprehension.
References


Appendix A

Daily Observation Checklist

Student: ___________________________ Date: ___________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Checklist</th>
<th>Observation Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student formulates appropriate and open-ended questions.</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student articulates confusion.</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student interprets text by using evidence/examples to support opinions/evaluations.</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student uses personal experience to connect to the text, make inferences, predict and use foreshadowing.</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student considers ideas of other students and weighs conflicting evidence.</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student identifies complexity while answering questions (looks for more than one explanation or answer).</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student refers to literary elements (characters, setting, mood and theme) during group discussion.</td>
<td>3  2  1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Reading Comprehension Test  Boy: Tales of Childhood

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Directions: Complete the following questions. Use a separate sheet of paper if needed.

1. Why do you think the narrator had such strong feelings about Mrs. Pratchett? Give examples from the story to support your answer and explain.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

2. When the boys are lined up in the schoolyard, what does the narrator assumed has happened? How does he feel? Use examples from the story to support your answer.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

3. What if the story were told from Mrs. Pratchett’s point of view? How might she have described the series of events? Use examples from the text to support your answer.

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
Appendix B (cont.)

Reading Comprehension Test

Exploring the Titanic

Name: ____________________________________________

Directions: Complete the following questions. Use a separate sheet of paper if needed.

1. Why do you think the captain ignored the warnings concerning icebergs in the area? What was his response? Use details from the story to support your answer.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. How does this disaster compare with another recent disaster that you can think of? What has been learned from disasters such as the sinking of the Titanic?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. How would you describe the mood of the passengers as they boarded the ship? What about their mood upon learning that the ship was in danger of sinking? Use details from the story to support your answer and explain.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________


Reading Comprehension Test

The Scholarship Jacket

Name: ________________________________

Directions: Complete the following questions. Use a separate sheet of paper if needed.

1. Explain Martha’s conflicting feelings in the principal’s office. What is causing her confusion? Use examples from the story to support your answer.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

2. Why does Martha’s grandfather refuse to pay for the scholarship jacket? Explain why he feels this way using examples from the story.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

3. What does Martha’s grandfather teach her? Explain how you felt when you realized why he made his decision about the jacket. Use examples from the story to support your answer.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
Appendix C

Comprehension Test Scoring Rubric

Name: ____________________________  Date: ____________

Story: ____________________________  Grade: ____________

Score 3 = Answered the question correctly, used an example from the text and explained the connection to the text
2 = Completed only two of the above criteria
1 = Completed only one of the above criteria
0 = Did not complete any of the above criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question #1</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question #2</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question #3</td>
<td>3 2 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Explanation
Appendix D

Student Literature Circle Survey

Story __________________________________ __

Circle the number that best answers each of the following questions.

1 = strongly agree
2 = somewhat agree
3 = no opinion
4 = somewhat disagree
5 = strongly disagree

1. The discussion group helped me understand the story better.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Participating in a discussion group makes the story easier to understand.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I enjoy literature circles because I learn more when I discuss the story in a small group.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I understand literature better when I read independently.

1 2 3 4 5

5. Discussing literature in a group allows me to learn from others.

1 2 3 4 5
Appendix E

Discussion Heuristic Prompts

Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl

1. Why did the boys go into the candy shop even though Mrs. Pratchett treated them so badly?
2. Why did Thwaites’ father tell his son such ridiculous stories about eating candy?
3. Why didn’t the health department make Mrs. Pratchett clean up the store?
4. Describe Mrs. Pratchett’s appearance. Do you think this is accurate? Why or why not?
5. What might have happened had the great mouse plot had backfired?
6. Describe the punishment the boys received. Do you think it was appropriate? Why or why not?

Exploring the Titanic by Robert D. Ballard

1. What recent disaster do you know of? How have they affected your life?
2. Do you have a hero in your life? Explain the qualities needed to be a true hero.
3. Make a list of the most important qualities of courage.
4. Describe the accommodations about the Titanic, and explain the differences among the various social classes.
5. Visualize yourself on the deck of the Titanic when it struck the iceberg. What do you think your reaction would have been when the ship began to sink?
6. Predict what might have been the outcome had the captain reacted to the warnings earlier.

The Scholarship Jacket by Marta Salinas

1. In what ways does Martha remind you of yourself, a friend or another student?
2. Have you ever been treated unfairly? Describe an experience of prejudice you have been involved in or heard about.
3. Describe your feelings about Martha at the end of the story. How would you have reacted if this had happened to you?
4. In what settings can prejudice sometimes be found? Explain your response.
5. What does Martha learn from her grandfather? How?
Appendix F

Double-Entry Journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt:</th>
<th>Response:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The positive aspects of today’s literature circle meeting included...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Include successful use of comprehension strategies as well as positive group interaction).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prompt:</th>
<th>Response:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The negative aspects of today’s literature circle meeting included...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Include any problems you may have encountered</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G

**Discussion Director**

Name ___________________________ Group __________

Book ___________________________ Assignment pgs. _______ to _______

**Discussion Director:** Your job is to develop three questions dealing with the reading assignment for today. Focus on questions that ask about feelings, opinions (not questions that have yes and no answers).

- What did you think about......?
- How did you feel when........?
- In your opinion, why did......?

**QUESTIONS:**

1. 

2. 

3. 

**EVALUATION:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Members</th>
<th>Did Job</th>
<th>Contributed to Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
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What we learned in our group today: __________________________________

Predictions for the next reading assignment: ____________________________
Appendix H

The Connector

Name ___________________________ Group _______________

Book __________________________ Assignment pgs._________—________

**Connector:** Your job is to make connections between the story and the world around you. This means connecting the reading to one or more of the following:

- Your own life
- Other people or events
- Similar happenings at other times or places
- Other books or stories
- Activities going on at school or in the community

**Step One:** Write a paragraph or two making a connection between the story and world around you.

**Step Two:** Share your writing with the group and discuss how others might make a connection between the story and their own lives.
Appendix I

**Word Wizard**

Name _____________________________________________ Group ________________

Book __________________________ Assignment pgs. __________ — __________

**Word Wizard:** Your job is to look for at least five special words in today’s text. These words should include one or more of the following:

- * New
- * Strange
- * Important
- * Different
- * Interesting
- * Difficult

**Step One:** Fill in the chart below.

**Step Two:** Discuss the words that you chose with the members of your group. Talk about how the word fits into the story, the word’s meaning, how does the word make you feel and whether or not another word might be used in its place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Why I picked this word</th>
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Appendix J

Passage Picker

Name ___________________ Group ______________

Book ____________________ Assignment pgs. ________ — ________

Passage Picker: Your job is to pick at least two paragraphs or selections from the story and read them aloud during the group discussion time. These may include:

* An interesting part
* A funny or sad part
* Very good writing
* A good descriptive part
* A scary or mysterious part
* A favorite part

Step One: Fill in the chart below.

Step Two: Discuss with the group any passages that they might have selected for today’s reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paragraph</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Why I chose it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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- Select paragraphs from the text and read them aloud to the group. Use the text to guide the discussion group. Be sure to select paragraphs that interest you because it will create a good atmosphere for discussion.
Appendix K

January 17, 2006

Dear Parent:

During the Spring Semester, 2006, I am student teaching with your child’s teacher, Mrs. Sherry Cooley. As part of the requirements of my internship, I must analyze at least two video tapes of myself teaching. While the focus of the taping will be on my teaching methods, the students in the classroom may appear on the tape. Therefore, I am asking permission to allow your child to possibly be seen on the video tape as I teach and work with the children. These video tapes will only be used by me, my college supervisor and the cooperating teacher to help me learn to be a competent teacher. They will never be seen in a public format such as the school or college class unless additional permission is sought.

Additionally, I am required to prepare a portfolio to document my work during the internship. To do so, I may need to include copies of student work or pictures of students working with me or other classmates. The names of the children will never appear in print or on their work. I ask your permission to possibly use your child’s work or picture.

Please sign this form and return it to school only if your child may not be taped or photographed.

Sincerely,

Brent D. Suffel

__________________________ may not be taped during the video taping
(child’s name) of the student teacher or have their work copied for the portfolio.

__________________________
(parent signature)