

Literature Circles in the Classroom as a Motivational Strategy for High School Students  
to Read Recreationally during SSR at Bellevue West High School.

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### Abstract

High School Students at Bellevue West High School seem to have little motivation to actually read during what is referred to as Silent Sustained Reading (SSR). The librarian and the school community need to create a program to motivate the students of Bellevue West High School to read recreationally with the intention of creating intrinsic motivation for these students. They are given the time everyday to read recreationally, but they are not using it very effectively. Developing literature circles among students is intended to encourage and motivate these students to read recreationally through peer interaction. The librarian and teachers will need to create an environment for these literature circles to take place, as well as help them be successful as a student-centered organization.

The idea of creating Literature Circles came from my realization as a teacher at Bellevue West High School that students are not using Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) appropriately. It was extremely challenging as a teacher to get my students motivated to actually read during this designated reading time everyday for 22 minutes. When literature circles were mentioned in the course TE 869: Intro to School Library Program through the University of Nebraska, Kearney I decided to come up with a way to incorporate an idea of literature circles to possibly motivate these Bellevue West High School students to read during SSR. I would like to take the idea of literature circles and revamp it to fit a specific need at Bellevue West High School. A benefit of doing a literature circle like this is that more novels are being read and discussed in the classroom making more viewpoints and topics that are being appreciated by the students (Dyers, 2014, p. 40).

### **Description**

Each month, students will be able to get together in to small groups or maybe as an entire class as a literature circle. In this literature circle each month students will get the opportunity to talk together with their peers about books they have been reading. Instead of students all reading the same book and discussing the same book, the idea of these literature circles is for students to talk about books that they have and are reading. So, each student may talk about a completely different book or magazine, etc. They can share their passion and interest with their peers in hopes that other students will want to read a book or an item that a classmate has discussed or talked about.

The young adult literature genre would be something the groups could focus on the first few literature circles that went on during this designated SSR time. Students

should consult a goodreads.com list to pick out a few books to use as a point of discussion during the literature circles. I could start the reading circle off with a young adult novel I have enjoyed reading myself. As a genre, young adult literature has a stigma attached to it. But, young adult literature can expose students to diverse viewpoints and can be more relevant and meaningful to high school students than canonical literature (Dyer, 2014, p. 33). Also, by using young adult literature as a genre, it may give students an opportunity to discuss during the literature circles real issues that they have or are experiencing. This may in turn, foster an intrinsic motivation to read a certain novel for some students. If they are experiencing a real life issue that is mentioned in the literature circle from a student about a novel being read, they may want to also read that novel just to find out more about this experience. Students are going to enjoy reading something they can relate to.

Students should be exposed to multicultural literature in these literature circles. Multicultural literature is often more relevant to students than classic literature. These classical literature titles prevent students from hearing from non-white and non-male viewpoints. Multicultural literature will give students a way to experience genuine voices and stories of a diverse group of authors (Dyer, 2014, p. 34).

High School Students tend to go to movies on the weekends. If books that are also movies are discussed in the literature circles, students may be more likely to read them because they saw the movie or want to see the movie. Referring to the goodreads.com “Best Young Adults Books” list, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Divergent* by Veronica Roth, and *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green are all on the list and would be great young adult novels to discuss in the literature circle because they are

all pretty recent movies, as well. So, students may be able to relate to the novel being discussed because they have seen the movie.

### **Collaborative Partnership**

The school librarian will need to collaborate with teachers in order to help the teachers set up effective literature circles in each class during the designated SSR time. The librarian will encourage teachers to use the goodreads.com “Best Young Adult Books” list and pick a book off the list they have read or are willing to read and discuss with the students at the literature circle. In order for the literature circles to work effectively, teachers and the librarian will need to participate and discuss with the students on their level. The literature circles should be student driven, but the teacher should be involved by participating just like a student. The librarian, administrators, deans, and other staff members will make classroom visits on the days of the literature circles during the designated SSR time to participate and help the teacher out where needed. Students need to see the entire community involved in the importance of the SSR time.

### **Integration of Digital Tools**

Students and teachers will refer to the goodreads.com lists to help them select books to read for discussion later in the literature circles. Once the literature circles are in full swing and working effectively, this will be more of a supplemental thing that probably won't be necessary. Another integration of a digital tool would be to create an online literature circle where all students from the school could get online during the SSR time and join a literature circle they have interest in, the librarian could organize and title each group to interest the students. Since Bellevue West is a Google school, the librarian

could create Google hangouts for students to join and discuss the novels, or anything they have been reading.

### **Resources Needed**

The physical resources needed to implement these literature circles include a goodreads.com or equivalent book list, young adult books, multicultural books, and Google email accounts for all students and staff involved. The time used for the literature circles already exist in the bell schedule, and we will use this designated SSR time to implement the literature circles. In order for the literature circles to work effectively, the entire school community will need to be involved. So, the personnel needed to implement the literature circles would include the school librarian, classroom teachers, administrators, and other specialists in the school.

### **Motivational Base**

High School Students are busy individuals who are overwhelmed with schoolwork, so to get them interested in reading during this designated SSR time instead of doing homework is quite the task. Studies have shown that when students are involved in conversation about literature, they are more engaged, and they take more risks (Auger, 2003). So creating these literature circles will encourage students to have conversations about the literature they are reading and will hopefully encourage them to read a book that may have been discussed or talked about in the literature circle.

Literature circles allow for students to make choices about their learning. Students are given the opportunity to basically select any young adult novel they have interest in reading. Students need more opportunities to make choices in school. Choice leads to deeper engagement and increased intrinsic motivation (Aguilar, 2010).

Literature circles are fun, mostly because they are a social experience (Aguilar, 2010). High School Students love to talk, so give them something meaningful to talk about with these literature circles and let them run with it. Students are expected to talk a lot in these literature circles. Students are invited to bring their experiences and feelings into the group and to share them. Reading needs to be fun for them, if the experience isn't enjoyable, our students will not likely continue it on their own (Aguilar, 2010).

Literature circles encourage students to share with each other and ask questions of one another in a way that is not always possible for students (Scott, 1994). Students at the high school level will rarely discuss a good book, having these literature circles will create an environment for the students to do this.

### **Reading Role Base**

The literature circles will support the role of the school librarian in several ways. The school librarian will practice collection development and support environments that reflect diverse learning. I would do this by promoting and setting up these literature circles in the school community. I would also as take a leadership role in organizing these circles that engage learners and motivate them to be lifelong readers (AASL, 2011, p. 1). The librarian will create literature circles where students hear from their peers and have peer interaction to encourage each other to read young adult literature.

The school librarian will collaborate with classroom teachers to go over a goodreads.com book list and help teachers create good learning environments with these literature circles. The school librarian will collaborate with teachers so that teachers know how to run an effective student-centered literature circle.

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