

### *Discussing The Glass Castle in Literature Circles*

**Time:** 50-Minute Period

**Setting:** 9<sup>th</sup> grade World Literature Classroom, 22 students

**Theory:**

1. According to *Getting Started with Literature Circles*, “Literature circles provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to books. Collaboration is at the heart of this approach. Students reshape and add onto their understanding as they construct meaning with other readers. Finally, literature circles guide students to deeper understanding of what they read through structured discussion and extended written and artistic response.”

Furthermore, Jim Burke promotes literature circles as a means to help foster a sense of occupation in the classroom, “Occupation challenges us to remember that what we teach must be anchored in the real world” (Burke 15). Literature circles teach students to occupy a specific role in a group, while at the same time, teaching them to read more closely from different perspectives. By being responsible for one specific aspect of the novel, such as vocabulary or character development, analysis and comprehension becomes more manageable.

2. Students should already be familiar with the major themes of the novel by this point in the unit. However, this is the first time students are working in literature circles, so they may need some explanation regarding their specific role in the group.

3. There are no supplementary reading materials necessary for this lesson.

4. This is a “during reading” lesson for the 2-week unit on *The Glass Castle*.

**Objectives:**

1. Students will discuss pages 129-164 of *The Glass Castle* in small literature circles. Each student will take on one of the following roles: Summarizer, Literary Luminary, Discussion Director, Vocabulary Enricher, Travel-Tracer. (Specific responsibilities explained on Literature Circles Worksheets).
2. Students will delegate discussion responsibilities and use their individual insights and comprehension to inform a small group of their peers.

**Materials:** The Glass Castle, “Literature Circle Roles” Worksheets

**Preparation:** Prior to class, the teacher should have assigned students into groups of 4 and 5. In order to maximize class time, the teacher should have moved desks into groups. If possible, have a seating chart prepared in advance and on display at the front of the room. There will need to be 5 copies of each worksheet.

## **Procedure**

### **Day 1**

1. As students come in the door, instruct them to sit in their assigned group. Groups should be pre-assigned and listed at the front of the classroom. (2 minutes)
2. Explain to students that they will be working in small literature circles for the next two days in order to discuss the second half of the novel. (3 minutes)
3. Distribute “Literature Circle” worksheets to each group. Explain the responsibilities of each group member. (5 minutes)
4. Give students 1 minute to discuss which roles they want with their groups. Ask all the “summarizers” to raise their hand, all the “Vocab Enrichers,” etc. in order to make sure all students are clear on their role. Record the roles of all students.
5. Allow students the rest of the class period to work in their role worksheets. Encourage students to collaborate with other people who have their same role.
6. Students should finish their worksheets for homework and come in ready to participate in literature circles the following day.

### **Day 2**

1. Students should sit with their literature circle groups and begin discussion as soon as the bell rings.
2. As students are discussing, the teacher should spend at least 10 minutes with each group. If possible, place a recording device at every group. (While you will not be able to listen to all 45 minutes of discussion, it will encourage students to stay on task.)

## **Discussion Ideas**

If groups have additional time, they should discuss the following questions:

1. How is West Virginia different from Phoenix?

2. Why are the children put in low level classes at school?
3. How does race become an issue at this point in the book?

### **Bilingual/ESL Accommodations**

ESL students should be paired with group members who are proficient in the language and will be able to work collaboratively, despite the language barrier. In order to understand their role in the group, ESL students might need a few key instructions translated. Teachers might consider assigning the ESL student to the Vocabulary Enricher role, as it would be the most mutually beneficial. As always, students should have access to an electronic translator.

**AAVE:** Standard English is not required for any of the assessments in this lesson. Students need only write the correct answers on the worksheet. However, students should be aware that they need to speak in a manner that enables effective group communication.

### **Special Education Accommodations: Asperger Syndrome**

This lesson might pose particular problems for a student with Asperger Syndrome because of the group work and literary analysis. The following strategies should be used to help make the lesson more manageable for a student with AS:

- Create a “circle of friends,” a group of responsible peers for the student with AS, who will not abandon him, serve as a model of appropriate social behavior, and protect against teasing or bullying.. (Organization for Autism Research).
- Encourage the student to create a digital character chart
- As for reading the book, there are electronic copies available online that might help the student concentrate on the text. If the student is on the lower end of the Autism spectrum, allow him to choose a few parts of the book that he thinks would be the most interesting and manageable.

### **Assessment**

- The “Literature Circles” worksheets will be the primary mode of assessment for this lesson. The worksheets will be worth 10 points each, determined by the accuracy and effort of student responses. Standard English conventions will not be required.

- Observation of student engagement also plays an important role in this lesson. Students will receive 10 points for the contributions they make to their lit. circle discussions. Students will be evaluated through direct observations and through the recording of their group discussion.

### **Extension Ideas**

- Literature circles combine with one another to share key points of their discussions
- Literature circles take place via an online forum, such as a Ning website, allowing all students in the class to comment and engage with one another's ideas.
- Groups who are particularly good at lit. circle discussions model to the rest of the class through a "fishbowl" demonstration. (One group's discussion will take place in the center of the room while the rest of the class observes.)

### **Resource and References**

ABC Teach. *Literature Circles. Abcteach -- 5000 Free Printable Pages and Worksheets.* ABC Teach, 2010. Web. 09 Dec. 2010.

<[http://www.abcteach.com/directory/basics/reading/literature\\_circles/](http://www.abcteach.com/directory/basics/reading/literature_circles/)>.

Burke, Jim. *The English Teachers' Companion: a Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum, and the Profession.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 2008. Print.

Hill, Bonnie Campbell, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Janine A. King. *Literature Circles in Middle School: One Teacher's Journey.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 2003. Print.

OAR | Educators & Service Providers » 6 Steps to Success for Asperger Syndrome." *Organization for Autism Research.* Organization for Autism Research, 2010. Web. 11 Dec. 2010.

<<http://www.researchautism.org/educators/aspergersteps/index.asp>>.

Walls, Jeannette. *The Glass Castle: a Memoir.* New York: Scribner, 2005. Print.

### **Source of Activity**

Thanks to ABC Teach for providing free access to the worksheets.

Thanks to Mrs. Rachel Casbeer at Urbana Middle School for allowing me to participate in her class' literature circles.

Thanks to Danelle Jordan and Professor Willis for providing me with an opportunity to partake in a peer literature circle.

### **Illinois State English/Reading/Language Arts Goals**

**4.A.4a** Apply listening skills as individuals and members of a group in a variety of settings (e.g., lectures, discussions, conversations, team projects, presentations, interviews). *Literature circles clearly promote listening skills within the context of a student-directed discussion.*

**1.A.5b** Analyze the meaning of abstract concepts and the effects of particular word and phrase choices. *All of the roles within the literature circle are intended to promote independent analytical reading skills, such as asking questions about abstract concepts and stopping to look up unfamiliar words. This standard is addressed most explicitly in the “Literary Luminary” role, whose task is to “spotlight” significant or confusing aspects of the text.*

### **Reflection**

I am aware that literature circles are typically used when students are reading different novels, however I think they can be valuable in this context as well. For many students, it can be an overwhelming experience to engage in a discussion with the entire class, so these smaller discussion groups are intended to help those students feel more comfortable. Hopefully, shy students will gain confidence in the small groups, and eventually be able to share their opinions with the entire class. While literature circles can be amazingly effective, I think teachers need to be cautious with them. Any lessons that require a lot of group work and collaboration are more difficult to supervise.

I think it is important for students to practice reading aloud with fluency, but once again, it can be overwhelming for some students to practice in front of an entire class. I am curious if students would benefit from reading together in their literature circle. If so, I would consider modifying my unit schedule to have students spend more time reading aloud with one another in literature circles.

I plan to use literature circles often when I get into the field because I love the way they help make the reading process a social experience. I know it may be a bit idealistic, but I hope reading circles motivate students to one day participate in a book club or discussion group outside of school.