Exploring the effect of literature circles on reading comprehension and motivation

Christina Anderson
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EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF LITERATURE CIRCLES ON
READING COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION

by
Christina Anderson

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by
Professor

Date Approved 6/23/05

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The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of literature circles on elementary school children. It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in reading comprehension and reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the literature circle structure. The sample included a predetermined class of 24 third-grade students, which consists of 9 females and 15 males.

The non-treatment conditions consisted of small group guided reading lessons. The treatment conditions consisted of the implementation of literature circles. Student reading comprehension was measured by a series of pretests and post-tests. To measure reading motivation and attitude, the researcher used the method of observation and interviews. By using a t-test to compare test scores, the researcher found that there was not a significant difference between the non-treatment conditions (small group guided reading) and the treatment conditions (literature circles). Although, the researcher's observations and student interviews show a significant positive change after the implementation of literature circles, the hypothesis was not supported.
Acknowledgements

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packed lunches, hot meals, and an occasional laugh. My father not only financially supported me this past year to make my dreams come true, but he also gave me the freedom to make my own choices, even when they were different from his own. My mother has helped me to see the good in everything and her unrelenting belief in me has given me the strength to push forward and will always serve as my driving force. She truly is the wind beneath my wings.
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Chapter One
Scope of the Study

Introduction

The pinnacle of reading education is teaching comprehension strategies. Students may learn to decode words and read proficiently, but if they do not comprehend what they are reading, they are unable to create meaning, connect with the text, or enjoy reading. Many consider reading comprehension and reading motivation as two characteristics that go hand in hand in creating capable readers (Tompkins, 2003).

Research supports the fact that many of the elements of literature circles compliment and promote these characteristics. In order for students to comprehend what they are reading, they must be fully absorbed in the text and critically thinking about it. For this to take place, young readers must incorporate learned reading strategies during reading and participate in class discussion and questioning after reading. Literature circles provide students with the opportunity and tools to critically read independently and hold a peer discussion the next day in class (Tompkins, 2003).

Also, the peer interaction and structure of literature circles provides students with the necessary elements to create reading motivation. Literature circles create choice and accountability for students who participate in them. Students choose the book they are interested in reading and they are given a role to prepare for the discussion. Being given a choice creates a positive feeling of independence and motivation to want to read the
book. Having a role to prepare for provides young readers with responsibility and accountability. They must take charge of their learning. This, in turn, creates innate motivation to do well. These combined elements of literature circles will create capable young readers (Tompkins 2003).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of literature circles on elementary school children. This study was important on two levels. First, reading comprehension is vital to literacy. Finding an effective method to teach literacy and to create an intrinsic desire to read should always be in the forefront of education (Tompkins, 2003).

Second, in lieu of the *No Child Left Behind Act* and *Reading First* grants, it is in the schools' best interests to equip their students with the knowledge, skills, and strategies to be effective, capable readers. Schools, administrators, and classroom teachers are being held accountable for students' test scores. Therefore, schools are always looking for methods to increase reading skills. Literature circles seem to be a straightforward avenue to satisfy this need (Guthrie 2002).

Will the implementation of literature circles in an elementary school classroom promote reading comprehension and motivation to read? Many less capable readers lack in these two areas. In fact, unmotivated readers are rarely good readers. In turn, these non-motivated students probably do not grasp the strategies inherent in reading comprehension. Without this understanding of what they are reading, students will not
connect with the text and will have no interest in what they are reading. Hence, a negative cycle ensues that ultimately leads to inadequate student literacy skills (Tompkins, 2003).

Statement of the Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in reading comprehension and reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the literature circle structure.

Limitations of the Study

The following variables were limitations to the study:

The major limitation of the study was the sample. Because the parameters of the study only allowed for a predetermined class of students as participants, the sample was not representative of the entire population of third-grade students. Also, the sample size was small (N=24). Because the researchers conducted the study in a school with only one third-grade class, the researcher had no other group of comparable students. To compensate for this, the researcher studied the same group of students under non-treatment conditions of small group guided reading and under the treatment conditions of literature circles for comparison.

Another limitation included the amount of time allotted to conduct the study. The researcher implemented the treatment within an allotted class time designated by the classroom teacher. The researcher had twenty to thirty minutes each day with a given
group to conduct the literature circles. Also, the researcher could only observe each group
every other day. Additionally, the implementation of the treatment could only last for six weeks due to time constraints. These given time constraints could have affected the results of the study. A longer time dedicated to the treatment could have produced change or impacted the results.

Definition of Terms

The following key terms were defined for this study:

*Literature circles* – an instructional approach in which students meet in small groups to respond to the reading of a self-selected book by taking on revolving roles

*Motivation* - the desire and drive of students to not only read, but understand and discuss what they are reading

*Student engagement* - reading for enjoyment, applying various reading strategies, actively participating through discussion, and having personal reading goals

*Reading comprehension* - an understanding of what one is reading, being able to make sense of a text in order to make a connection with prior knowledge to create meaning
Chapter Two
Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of literature circles on elementary school children. It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in reading comprehension and reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the literature circle structure.

Reading Comprehension

Barton and Sawyer (2003) claim there are key components to comprehension instruction. The researchers point out that all of these key components can be incorporated into literature circles. The six key components to reading comprehension instruction are: repeated exposure to different kinds of writing, reader/text connections, focused student response, direct instruction in using comprehension strategies, visual structures to support comprehension, and awareness of the comprehension process.

It is vital for young learners to be familiar with a variety of texts in order to be better prepared in the future and to better understand meaning. Different genres and different authors create a springboard for students to learn and comprehend a variety of texts (Barton & Sawyer 2003).
Having a reader make a connection with what they are reading leads to comprehension. According to Barton and Sawyer, “The act of making personal connections also aids comprehension through schema activation – connecting what the reader already knows about a given topic with the new information offered in the text.”

Focused student response refers to having students talk, write, or draw what they have read as a way to aid comprehension. Questions raised by a teacher or other students about the text enhance comprehension. Hence, discussion is a vital element of comprehension instruction. Without this type of student response, comprehension is rarely strengthened (Barton & Sawyer 2003).

Teaching children numerous thinking strategies is at the heart of the comprehension process. Readers must first have the resources of different strategies in order to work through difficult and challenging text. Barton and Sawyer determined a list of ten essential comprehension strategies. These strategies include: locating details, sequencing, comparing and contrasting, summarizing, envisioning character change, drawing conclusions, determining cause and effect, making predictions, making thematic connections, and taking multiple perspectives.

According to Barton and Sawyer, “visual structures are powerful tools for comprehension instruction because they offer concrete, memorable representations of abstract thinking processes. Any kind of visual organization aids reading comprehension.

Lastly, self-awareness of the comprehension process, also referred to as metacognition, refers to an interactive discussion about the comprehension strategies that one is using. This includes having students name the strategy they are employing, discuss
why they are using it, and if it is helpful. This actual awareness of the thinking process helps students understand the comprehension process and make it more meaningful (Barton & Sawyer 2003).

Barton and Sawyer also conducted a study based on these beliefs. They incorporated these key comprehension components in a third-grade classroom. Results showed that students started to use the “literature language” among themselves, students developed deeper personal connections with the text, students employed comprehension strategies with greater regularity, and students became more flexible in their thinking.

Reading Motivation

In an ideal literature circle, students select a book of their own choice to read and discuss and have opportunities to connect with their peers by making interpretations in cooperative groups. Intrinsic motivation is inherent in literature circles because students are encouraged to read, write, explore and reflect. According to Gove and Long (2004), with the help of well-chosen literature, the classroom environment can become one of curiosity and inquiry. Through one study conducted, researchers found that literature circles allowed participants to connect with what they were reading and showed emotional involvement in what they were talking about (Gove & Long, 2004). Gove and Long depict this type of motivation and involvement by explaining the ideal literature circle:

In an ideal classroom, literature circle discussions would be student-led. and "authentic" – that is children would have an interest in one another’s opinions about the themes within the text and show this interest by
discussing one another’s ideas. The discussions would not mirror common classroom patterns of dialogue (question, response, acceptance, evaluation). …there would be much talk of character’s motivations and beliefs leading to connections to students’ lives as well as other literature. Children would solicit others’ opinions and talk when they had something important to add, not just because it was ‘their turn’. …Students would interpret from more than one perspective and point of view; would be purposeful and reflective; and would question one another, change their minds and push one another’s’ thinking…(p.354)

Furthermore, readers become engaged when they are part of a reading community where there is an exchange of ideas. Student engagement happens naturally as part of participation and discussion. Not only does this idea of community create engagement, it also creates motivation for young readers (Bryan, Fawson, Parker, & Reutzel, 2003).

Many believe that literature circles can actually change the classroom atmosphere to be more open, active, cooperative, and responsible. Student choice and student roles create much cooperation and responsibility while the cooperative group discussions lead to an open and active group (Burns, 1998). Burns also believes that student choice and social interaction, inherent in literature circles, lead to motivation which creates success.

Tompkins (2003) states that motivation is affected by what types of activities students are involved in. According to Tompkins, open-ended activities where the students are in control, such as those involved in literature circles, are the most successful motivators. Also, intrinsic motivation is linked with social interaction. People want to socialize, discuss ideas, and participate.

According to Walker (2003), it is imperative for struggling readers to have opportunities to read text and construct meaning in a social context. “Social interactions,
scaffolding, a focus on meaning, and the use of individual differences support struggling readers as they learn to read (Walker, 2003).” These elements, all part of literature circles, create an inherent motivation to understand meaning.

Current Studies

The following is an in-depth look at three pertinent studies conducted:

Two researchers (Gove and Long) conducted a study to determine if literature circles promote “critical response” in a fourth-grade classroom. They believe that by incorporating engagement strategies and literature circles together in the classroom, students will develop critical response skills. Critical response involves both the teacher and students working in unison to create an encouraging environment of inquiry and thinking beyond the obvious.

Engagement strategies should enable students to question, imagine, investigate and think about events in a text in order to connect a deeper meaning with what they are reading. The first strategy is to ask open-ended questions and encourage student responses. The second strategy involves pushing students to investigate and think deeper to read between the lines. The third strategy is to encourage students to problem-solve regarding events in the text they are reading. Literature circles seem the ideal pairing with these engagement strategies because students select their own groups by choosing a text that they are interested in reading and are given much opportunity to discuss what they are reading.
The study was conducted with 16 African American, fourth-grade students in a poor, urban area. Researchers decided to choose a variety of literature based on racism in the South for the students to read. Three literature circles were formed and engagement strategies were implemented. From the beginning, students showed signs of critical response when probed. Throughout the study, students’ skills grew tremendously as they were able to critically think and discuss the text. Furthermore, students were engaged in activities that probed them to think and act as if they were characters from that time.

Overall, the study was successful because the literature chosen was purposeful and rich in content. The African American students from a poor, urban neighborhood could identify with racism in the South. Because of this, the experience became truly authentic for them and gave them great incentive to fully engage in the text.

Gove and Long observed the participants before, during and after the study. They also drew from valid research before beginning the study. In addition, both researchers are teachers themselves which gave them an added benefit. In the end, their research supported their thesis.

Another study was conducted by Fawson and Reutzel to determine if non-engaged fourth grade readers would benefit from literary discussions during sustained silent reading. Sustained silent reading (SSR) is defined by a period of time during the school day when everyone silently reads a self-selected book, without interruption. Through teaching experience and by reading research literature, the researchers found sustained silent reading alone does not promote reading achievement or engagement. They proposed that incorporating literary discussions as part of SSR would create an
intervention which would help otherwise unengaged readers to engage in their reading. For clarification, the researchers defined unengaged students as passive, inactive, inattentive, unenthusiastic, and using avoidance tactics during SSR which include any off-task activity.

Researchers conducted the study in a public elementary school located in an economically poor section of a Rocky Mountain area city. Three fourth grade students were chosen as participants based on teacher-recommendation, parent approval, and researcher observation. The researchers employed a multiple-baseline, across-subjects research design. They wanted to test the intervention on different participants but also limit the participants to clearly determine the effect of that intervention on an individual.

After collecting baseline data through observation during SSR, researchers implemented an intervention. The intervention consisted of individually pulling participants out of SSR and discussing what types of books the participants liked to read, what they were presently reading, and what types of reading strategies they used. After a five-day intervention, participants were observed again during a transfer period to see if there was an improvement in engagement during SSR. In all cases, engagement increased during SSR after the intervention of literary discussions. Therefore, evidence supports the researchers’ hypothesis that non-engaged fourth grade students would benefit from literary discussions during SSR.

The limitations of the study include a small sample (3 students). While this allows an in-depth analysis, it makes it hard to generalize results. Also, every participant was Caucasian. It would be interesting to conduct the study with an ethnically
heterogeneous group. Lastly, the intervention would not be feasibly replicated in the classroom. Realistically, most teachers do not have the time to pull each individual child aside each day for a literary discussion. Most likely, literary discussions would be carried out in a group setting.

A third study conducted by Blum, Lipsett, and Yocom looks at the incorporation of literature circles in a middle school inclusive classroom. The study set out to support the hypothesis that literature circles facilitate self-determination in special education students, which in turn will positively affect their perceptions of their reading ability. Self-determination requires students become active participants and involves metacognition, self-perception, social problem solving, and decision making. Researchers hypothesized that literature circles would appropriately promote self-determination because they foster independent relationships through discussions, problem-solving, and decision-making and they empower the reader through these processes.

Researchers conducted the study in an inclusive language arts classroom for eighth and ninth graders. Out of fourteen participants, four were classified as learning disabled and three were struggling readers. This group of seven became the target group. The study contained both qualitative and quantitative aspects by incorporating such data collection techniques as classroom observations, interviews, and document collection, as well as a statistical survey analysis. After literature circles were taught to the students through modeling and role practice, groups were formed based upon book choice. Researchers administered an identical survey before (in September) and after the literature circle implementation (in December). The five-item, Likert-scale survey asked
students to assess their own reading ability. Observations were based on anecdotal records and a rubric which evaluated student involvement, depth of understanding, and attitude toward the process. Interviews were conducted as well.

Results concluded that students accurately identified their reading abilities prior to the treatment and perceived an improvement after the treatment. Students' perceptions were supported based on the classroom teacher's understanding of the students and observation. The target group greatly contributed in the literature circle setting and understood the material by taking risks and communicating within the group. While the pre-survey showed a significant difference in responses between the two groups, the post-test showed no significant difference. Through student interviews, researchers found that students felt better prepared to read, understand, and discuss literature which led to self-determination. In summary, the study found that literature circles can be used as an effective tool in an inclusion classroom and for self-determination as well.

Researchers conducted a triangulation of data collection such as observation, interviews, and surveys for an in-depth analysis. By conducting qualitative and quantitative research, more information was available within the study. By collecting data before and after the treatment, researchers were able to see the progression of student self-perception. The study appropriately used a statistical analysis of variance (AVONA) to measure significance of survey results. Also, the study was able to make special education students become valued, active participants in the classroom.
Chapter Three
Procedures and Design

Introduction

The ultimate goal of reading educators is teaching comprehension strategies. When students are equipped with reading comprehension strategies, they can not only read the words on a page, they can create meaning, connect with a text, and hence, enjoy reading. Many consider reading comprehension and reading motivation as two characteristics that go hand in hand in creating capable readers (Tompkins, 2003).

Many of the elements of literature circles compliment and promote these characteristics. In order for students to comprehend what they are reading, they must be fully absorbed in the text and critically thinking about it. Utilizing learned reading strategies and participating in class discussion and questioning are vital to becoming a capable reader. Literature circles provide students with the opportunity and tools to accomplish this. Also, the structure of literature circles provides students with the necessary elements to create reading motivation. Literature circles create choice and accountability for students which can motivate students to want to read (Tompkins, 2003).

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of literature circles on elementary school children. It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in
reading comprehension and reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the literature circle structure.

Population and Sample

The setting of the study was an elementary school in southern New Jersey. The population of the study was general education, third grade students in southern New Jersey. The sample included a predetermined class of 24 third-grade students, which consists of 9 females and 15 males. The students ranged in age from 8 years old to 10 years old. The sample consists of 6 eight-year-old children, 17 nine-year-old children, and 1 ten-year-old child.

The class, as well as the school and the community, is ethnically diverse. According to the school website, a large majority of the students are considered “partially proficient” or low-readers.

Research and Design Procedures

The researcher conducted the study over a three-month period. Permission was granted from the school district superintendent. Permission was not needed from the parents because the study fit into the regular curriculum.

Non-Treatment Conditions: First, a reading comprehension pretest was administered to the sample of 24 third-grade students (see appendix A). The non-treatment conditions consisted of small group guided reading lessons. These lessons were part of the normal curriculum (see appendix B for lesson plans.) The researcher led the
group lessons. At the completion of all lessons, the same reading comprehension pretest was administered as a post-test to determine student gains.

*Treatment Conditions:* The following week, a different reading comprehension pre-test was given to the same sample (see appendix C). The researcher dedicated one week to explain and to model literature circles. The researcher modeled literature circles with *One Hundred Dresses* as a whole group (see appendix D for lesson plans). Following the explanation and modeling, the researcher selected four books by Roald Dahl. A book talk was given for each book to help the students select the book of their choice. Each child selected the book that they wanted to read. According to the children's book selections, the researcher broke the sample of twenty-four students into four groups. The literature circles ensued for the next four weeks. Each student was given a packet that contained their book, a notebook, and their role card explaining what they were supposed to do (see appendix E). When the literature circle treatment ended, the researcher administered the same reading comprehension test that served as the pre-test to the treatment. It served to determine student gains in the area of reading comprehension. The researcher then compared the analyzed test scores. Before beginning the literature circles and half way through, a letter was sent home to parents (see appendix F).

*Tools to Measure Reading Motivation and Attitude:* To measure reading motivation and attitude, the researcher used the method of observation and interviews. The researcher observed the literature circle discussions and assessed daily preparation and involvement of the sample (see appendix G for observation forms and assessment rubric). Also the researcher individually asked each member of the sample a series of
questions to determine their attitude towards reading and literature circles (see appendix H). The researcher attached copied samples of students’ work during the treatment (see appendix I).

Description of the Instrument

There were four instruments used in the study. The first two instruments were a set of two reading comprehension tests (see appendix A and C). The tests were standardized and contained the same format. Each test had three short selections to read with four comprehension questions to answer after each selection. The questions were multiple-choice with one open-ended essay response.

The researcher’s daily observations also served as an instrument. Daily observations were made by the researcher of the literature circles in progress. The researcher used a standard observation form with a rubric of daily preparation and participation (see appendix F).

The researcher’s interviews with the sample were also an instrument. A set of questions to be answered on a Likert scale were asked. A chance for open-ended comment was also given (see appendix G). The researcher individually interviewed each student based on the given questions.
Chapter Four
Findings of the Study

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of literature circles on elementary school children. It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in reading comprehension and reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the literature circle structure. The setting of the study was an elementary school in southern New Jersey. The sample included a predetermined class of 24 third-grade students, which consists of 9 females and 15 males.

First, a reading comprehension pretest was administered to the sample (24 third-grade students). The non-treatment conditions consisted of small group guided reading lessons. At the completion of all lessons, the same reading comprehension pretest was administered as a post-test to determine student gains. The following week, a different reading comprehension pre-test was given to the same sample. The treatment of literature circles ensued for the next four weeks. When the literature circles ended, the researcher administered the same reading comprehension test that served as the pre-test to the treatment. It served to determine student gains in the area of reading comprehension. The researcher then compared the analyzed test scores. To measure reading motivation and attitude, the researcher used the method of observation and interviews.
Findings

The researcher tested the students four times. Table 1 shows the results of these four tests. As stated, 24 students were pretested at the beginning of the study before non-treatment conditions were observed. The column “GR Pretest” refers to this test which was administered before the non-treatment conditions of guided reading began. Following the non-treatment conditions, a posttest was given. This refers to the second column labeled “GR Post-test”. The third column refers to the third test that was given at the start of the treatment conditions. This test was referred to as the literature circle pretest or “LC Pretest”. Lastly, the fourth column refers to the literature circle post-test or “LC Post-test”.

The results shown on table 1 indicate gains in student performance on both sets of post-tests when compared to corresponding pretests. While the researcher found that most scores were significantly low, almost all students improved on the post-tests. The researcher also noticed that both sets of pretest scores and both sets of post-test scores were numerically similar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>GR Pretest</th>
<th>GR Post-test</th>
<th>LC Pretest</th>
<th>LC Post-test</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>88</td>
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<td>16</td>
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Table 2 shows the standard deviation of each set of test scores. The standard deviation indicates how spread out a set of scores is around the average or mean. The calculated standard deviations for this study show a significant spread among the scores. While each set of scores varied, the non-treatment pretest was considerably more varied.
Table 3 indicates the results of the t-test. The researcher compared the scores of the non-treatment pretest (GR pretest) to the scores of the non-treatment post-test (GR post-test). The researcher also compared the scores of the treatment pretest (LC pretest) to the scores of the treatment post-test (LC post-test). The researcher chose to use a two-tailed test because of the uncertainty of a direction with the results. The t-test shows that there was a significant difference for both comparisons. Student scores significantly improved on both sets of post-tests when compared to the pretests. In addition, the results show that there was not a significant difference between the post-test scores after implementing literature circles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>GR Pretest</th>
<th>GR Post-test</th>
<th>LC Pretest</th>
<th>LC Post-test</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>88</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>
Table 4 indicates the score each student obtained from the researcher’s daily observations. The daily observations were based on how prepared each student was to present their role for the literature circle (LC Role Average) and the level of student participation during the literature circle (LC Discussion Average). The researcher averaged all of the students’ daily scores to obtain the information listed in the table. The researcher graded the students on a rubric from 0-4 (see appendix G). The results from table 4 indicate that the average scores were at about 2.5. Also, the researcher noticed that
most of the students who scored high in one section scored high in the other as well.

Conversely, the students who scored low in one section tended to score low in the other section as well.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>LC Role Average</th>
<th>LC Discussion Average</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>24</td>
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Average 2.5  2.6  
Median 2.5  2.5  
Mode 2.2  1.8
Table 5 shows how each student’s literature circle observation scores compared with their literature circle post-test score. The researcher was interested to find that while some students were prepared for their literature circle and participated in the discussions, their test score might not have indicated a greater level of reading comprehension. This was shown by lower test scores but higher observation grades. Conversely, while some students seemed to be poorly prepared for their literature circle and did not participate as much in the discussion, their test score may have been higher, indicating a higher level of reading comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>LC Role Average</th>
<th>LC Discussion Average</th>
<th>LC Post-test</th>
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Table 6 reveals the results from student interviews regarding their attitudes toward literature circles. The researcher asked each student individually a set of five questions regarding their attitude and feeling towards literature circles (see appendix H). The individual student interviews served the purpose of answering questions. Did the students view literature circles as beneficial to their learning? Did the built-in elements of independence and choice motivate the students to want to read? Each student was interviewed in seclusion to obtain their most candid and honest answers. The researcher explained that the students should answer each question on a Likert-scale (1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very much”). Results showed that the average response for each question was about a 4 (which indicated “pretty much”). This showed that the majority of students had a favorable attitude toward literature circles and felt motivated throughout the treatment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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Average 3.75 3.92 4.08 3.88 3.96
Chapter Five
Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of literature circles on elementary school children. It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in reading comprehension and reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the literature circle structure.

Summary of the Problem

Will the implementation of literature circles in an elementary school classroom promote reading comprehension and motivation to read? Many less capable readers lack in these two areas. In fact, unmotivated readers are rarely good readers. In turn, these non-motivated students probably do not grasp the strategies inherent in reading comprehension. Without this understanding of what they are reading, students will not connect with the text and will have no interest in what they are reading. Hence, a negative cycle ensues that ultimately leads to inadequate student literacy skills (Tompkins, 2003).

Summary of the Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that a third grade class that read independently through the use of the literature circle structure will show greater gains in reading comprehension and
reading motivation than when the same third grade class does not experience the
literature circle structure.

Summary of the Literature Review

The review of relevant literature on literature circles indicated that students who
experienced literature circles had greater reading comprehension skills. In addition, the
current research shows that students who are exposed to choice, accountability,
independence, responsibility, and peer interaction have greater motivation to want to
read. Because these elements are inherent in literature circles, many researchers have
found that literature circles are directly related to reading motivation as well as reading
comprehension.

Summary of the Procedures

First, a reading comprehension pretest was administered to the sample (24 third-
grade students.) The non-treatment conditions consisted of small group guided reading
lessons. At the completion of all lessons, the same reading comprehension pretest was
administered as a post-test to determine student gains. The following week, a different
reading comprehension pre-test was given to the same sample. The treatment of literature
circles ensued for the next four weeks. When the literature circles ended, the researcher
administered the same reading comprehension test that served as the pre-test to the
treatment. It served to determine student gains in the area of reading comprehension. The
researcher then compared the analyzed test scores. To measure reading motivation and attitude, the researcher used the method of observation and interviews.

Summary of the Findings

The findings indicated gains in student performance on both sets of post-tests when compared to corresponding pretests. While the researcher found that most scores were significantly low, almost all students improved on the post-tests. However, the researcher found that there was not a significant difference between the non-treatment post-test scores and the treatment post-test scores. The results showed that there was not a significant gain in student scores after implementing the literature circles than there was from implementing guided reading. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported.

The findings of the daily student observations indicated that the average scores were about 2.5 (scores range from 0-4). Also, the researcher noticed that most of the students who scored high in one section scored high in the other as well. Conversely, the students who scored low in one section tended to score low in the other section as well. In addition, the majority of students had a favorable attitude toward literature circles and felt motivated throughout the treatment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study adds to current research regarding literature circles. While the test scores do not reflect the benefits of literature circles, the observations and interviews do. There are many avenues to obtain student reading comprehension but
literature circles seems to encompass elements such as student independence, student choice, student-led discussions, and student accountability that ensure not only advanced reading comprehension, but reading motivation as well. In essence, literature circles can aid in not only helping children understand what they read, but to love to read. This is the gateway to the future as reading opens limitless doors to children.

On a personal note, the observation of the daily literature circles serves as the best advocate in favor of literature circles. Students who previously hated reading and were considered low-readers transformed into prepared and enthusiastic students. Sitting back and listening to the student-led conversions about what they were reading was an extremely gratifying experience. As facilitator of the literature circles, the researcher learned to withdraw from the spotlight as the students were better able to carry on a functioning literature circle on their own. The researcher observed students asking and discussing wonderfully thought-out and imaginative open-ended questions. Students were also observed using all of the previously discussed reading comprehension strategies with no difficulties at all. Although many test scores do not reflect this, the researcher holds that students made great gains by the experience.

Implications

The implications of this study indicate that students benefit from choice, independence, and accountability. Students are able to stretch their minds when given the opportunity and know what is expected of them. Additionally, when students feel that they are in control of their learning they are more likely to take charge of their learning.
and feel a greater intrinsic award from doing well. Children feel a greater investment when they are held accountable for their learning. Educators should take this into account when planning lessons in all subject areas, not only language arts.

Recommendations

In consideration of the limitations of this particular study, the researcher recommends that further research be conducted in the area of the benefits of literature circles. Perhaps, a similar study could be conducted with a control group. This would create a group of comparable students. While one group of the sample used literature circles, a similar group of students would use small-group guided reading. Also, a similar study should be conducted over a longer period of time. If the researcher had a whole school year to implement literature circles, greater results may have surfaced. Lastly, access to a second researcher would allow for a more comprehensive observation report. Because of time constraints, many times two literature circles occur simultaneously. A second researcher would ensure that every discussion was properly recorded.
References


Appendix A

Non-treatment Pretest and Post-test
Cozy Coats
What Fur Does for Mammals

by Dorothy Hinshaw Patent
photos by William Muñoz

How does fur help animals?

People love the soft feel of fur. We enjoy petting our dogs and stroking our cats. When we go to the zoo, we like to look at the beautiful patterns in the fur of lions, zebras, and giraffes. But why do animals have fur? What does it do for them?

The animals that have fur are called mammals. Besides having fur, mammals feed their young with milk from the mother's body. Mammals live in all sorts of places—the hot tropics, the bitter cold arctic, and everywhere in between.

Fur is part of what makes this wide range possible. One reason mammals can live in so many places is that they keep their bodies at a fairly constant temperature; this way, they can be active even when the air is very cold. Normal human body temperature is close to 98.6°F, for example, even if the air is colder or warmer. We use
clothes to warm our bodies. But fur keeps most other mammals warm by trapping air between the hairs. The air holds in heat, insulating the animals from the cold.

Do you have a dog or a cat? If so, you probably know that your pet, like many mammals, grows a thick coat in the winter. In the spring, it sheds the heavy coat and grows a sleek summer coat. In the fall, the summer coat is shed, and the thick winter coat grows back again.

Wild animals that live where winter is cold can have very different summer and winter coats. A winter wolf with its long, thick fur is beautiful. But in the summer, wolves can look scrawny with their short, thin coats. Most mammals living where it is hot year round have very short fur.

Mammals that live in water part of the time have very short coats, too. In water, fur slows an animal down while it swims. And strands of wet fur can’t trap insulating air, so the fur is unable to keep the body warm. The sea otter has a special way of getting around this problem. Its coat is fine and thick enough to hold air bubbles even in water. A sea otter must spend a lot of time tending to its coat, since a dirty coat won’t hold in the air. After cleaning its fur, the sea otter blows air bubbles into its coat before heading underwater again.

Seals, sea lions, and walruses have short fur that helps keep them warm in the air but doesn’t get in the way when they swim; a thick layer of fat, called blubber, under their skin holds in heat in the water. Whales, dolphins, and porpoises, which never leave the water, have sleek, hairless bodies and thick layers of blubber to keep them warm.

Besides being a cozy coat that keeps mammals warm, fur is often colored so that it helps protect its wearers from predators, animals that might hunt them. The predators can also be disguised by their coats, making it easier for them to get close to their prey. The stripes of zebras help them hide in the long African grass. They also break up the outline of the body, making it difficult for a lion
or other predator to tell where one zebra ends and another begins. Many mammals have spotted coats, which help them melt into their surroundings. Some animals change the color of their coats with the seasons. An arctic fox is white in winter and gray in summer. Its winter coat matches the arctic ice and snow, making it easier to hide from predators.

Some fur calls out a warning. The black-and-white coat of the skunk can’t be missed. It tells predators “Stay away, or you’ll be sorry!” If another animal gets too close, the skunk will spray it with a terrible-smelling liquid. And fur itself can be dangerous. Porcupine quills are giant hairs with very sharp tips. If a predator gets too close, a porcupine can strike it with its quilled tail; the quills come out and stick in the attacker’s skin. The tip of a quill has tiny sharp barbs that point backward, making it hard to remove.

Mammals use special kinds of hairs to get information about their environment. Whiskers are especially sensitive, thick hairs with nerves at their bases. When a whisker touches something, a message goes to the animal’s brain letting it know that an object is close. Cat whiskers are so sensitive that a blindfolded cat can still find its way around.

The wool we use to make coats and sweaters, for example, is actually a special kind of fur that comes from sheep.

For animals, fur is much more than just a soft and beautiful coat. Without fur, most mammals couldn’t survive—fur is their secret of success.
1. Because of their fur coats, animals can _______.
   A) go without taking baths
   B) breathe underwater
   C) live only in cool places
   D) keep a constant body temperature

2. Read this sentence from the passage.
   Besides being a cozy coat that keeps mammals warm, fur is often colored so that it helps protect its wearers from predators, animals that might hunt them.
   The word *predators* means _______.
   A) enemies
   B) surroundings
   C) warnings
   D) scientists

3. Whiskers are special hairs that animals use to _______.
   A) stay warm
   B) change colors
   C) get information
   D) call out a warning
4. Which of these is an opinion in the passage?
   A. Animals that have fur are called mammals.
   B. People love the soft feel of fur.
   C. Mammals feed their young with milk.
   D. Some animals change the color of their coats with the seasons.

5. Why did the author write this passage?
   A. to give directions for taking care of fur
   B. to tell a funny story about animals
   C. to warn people never to wear fur
   D. to teach why animals have fur
6. Draw a picture of an animal that has a fur coat. Below your picture, explain how the fur helps that animal.
Pedro and the Magic Dollar

by Mary Chandler
illustrated by Cindy Kiernicki

What is the magic dollar?

Pedro dug the toe of his worn sneaker into the dirt and shoved his hands into his pockets. Leon raced across the soccer field toward him.

"Did you bring it?" Leon asked, nudging Pedro's shoulder.

"No, Leon," he answered. "My dad didn't have any pesos."

"Not pesos, dummy, a dollar."

Five other boys surrounded them. They all laughed at Pedro. One of them handed a soccer ball to Leon.
"Too bad, Pedro," Leon said as he kicked the ball to one of his friends. "You can’t play until you pay me a dollar."

Pedro walked away. He sat in the shade of a pepper tree just outside the window of his third-grade classroom. He watched as Leon and the other boys played soccer.

"Hey, Pedro!" His sister Imelda ran from the playground and sat down beside him. "Want to hunt for rocks?"

Pedro shook his head. "Not right now. Third grade must be different at this school," he said. "Nobody had to pay to play soccer when we went to Harding Elementary."

Imelda put her hand on her brother’s arm. "Why don’t you tell, Pedro?" she asked. "Mrs. Stevens would make them let you play if you told on them."

"No, they really wouldn’t like me then," Pedro said.

Imelda frowned. "If they knew you had been on Harding’s championship soccer team last year, Leon would be paying you!"

"I’ll think of some way to play," Pedro said and shrugged his shoulders.

Back in his classroom, Pedro listened carefully as Mrs. Stevens talked about cocoons, larvae, and butterflies. He liked nature. In his grandparents’ Mexican village, Pedro and his grandmother had walked down to the seaport every day to welcome Grandpa as he returned with the other fishermen.

Pedro had enjoyed those walks with his grandmother. As they walked, they had seen tiny, red ants scurry to and fro in a long line, carrying food to their ant colonies. Closer to the beach, sand crabs had scuttled in and out of their homes in the sand hills. Lizards had sunned themselves on the slippery stones.

Pedro reached into his pocket and felt the smooth, black rattle rock his grandfather had given him on his last birthday.

"Shake it," Grandpa had said. "It’s called a rattle rock because, over a long period of time, deposits formed over a smaller rock. That’s what you hear rattling—the small rock inside the larger one."
Pedro had asked, "Where did you get it, Grandpa?"
"A visiting fisherman from Denmark gave it to me when I was just a young boy. It's very rare," Grandpa had said.
Grandpa wiped his hands on his overalls and hugged Pedro.
"Take it to California with you. It will bring you good luck."
Remembering what his grandfather had said, Pedro rubbed his fingers back and forth, back and forth over the smooth rock.
Pedro's thoughts were interrupted as Leon leaned over and whispered, "Remember, Pedro! If you want to play soccer, the price is a dollar."
Something clicked inside Pedro's head. "That's it!" he said out loud.
"What?" Leon asked.
Pedro smiled. "Nothing."

Pedro had asked, “Where did you get it, Grandpa?”
“A visiting fisherman from Denmark gave it to me when I was just a young boy. It’s very rare,” Grandpa had said.
Grandpa wiped his hands on his overalls and hugged Pedro.
“Take it to California with you. It will bring you good luck.”
Remembering what his grandfather had said, Pedro rubbed his fingers back and forth, back and forth over the smooth rock.
Pedro's thoughts were interrupted as Leon leaned over and whispered, “Remember, Pedro! If you want to play soccer, the price is a dollar.”
Something clicked inside Pedro’s head. “That’s it!” he said out loud.
“What?” Leon asked.
Pedro smiled. “Nothing.”
After feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs at home that evening, Pedro took off his shoes and rushed down to the beach near his house. His toes squished through the warm, wet sand as he walked closer to the shoreline. Some days, waves crashed against the jagged rocks, but today all he heard was the sound of the waves. *Good, he thought. Now if I just can find what I need.*

The ocean always deposited many treasures on the beach. Today, though, Pedro was searching for something special. *I won’t give up,* he thought as he searched along the shore.

Reaching into his pocket, he rubbed his rattle rock and thought about his grandparents back in Mexico. Pedro blinked and looked up. Bright ribbons of orange and red streaked the sky. In a few minutes, the sun would disappear into the ocean, and the sky would be dark.

Just then, Pedro stepped on something slippery. Reaching down to untangle himself, he opened his eyes wide. There it was, hidden under a clump of seaweed!

“You got my dollar?” Leon asked Pedro at school the following day.
"Yes," Pedro answered. "It's right here." He reached into his pocket and pulled out his treasure from the sea.

"Wow!" Leon said. "A sand dollar! I've never been able to find a sand dollar."

"Me, neither," Pedro agreed. "Not until last night. Here, Leon. It's for you."

"You'd give that to me?" Leon asked in disbelief. Pedro nodded.

Leon stared at the ground. "Pedro, I'm sorry. You can play soccer anytime you want," he said, "and I can't take your sand dollar."

Pedro grinned and tucked the magic dollar into Leon's shirt pocket.

"C'mon, Leon," he said. "We've got a game to play."
7. This story is mostly about ______.  
   (A) a boy who makes a new friend  
   (B) a fight between a brother and a sister  
   (C) how rocks are formed  
   (D) playing at the beach

8. Leon won't let Pedro play soccer until he ______.  
   (A) gives Leon a special rock  
   (B) pays Leon a dollar  
   (C) does Leon's homework  
   (D) joins Leon's team

9. You know Pedro plays soccer well because ______.  
   (A) he was on a championship team  
   (B) his grandfather played soccer  
   (C) he found a special rattle rock  
   (D) he practices every day at school

10. Read this sentence from the story.  
   In a few minutes, the sun would disappear into the ocean, and the sky would be dark.  
   The word disappear means ______.  
   (A) appear again  
   (B) appear too much  
   (C) not appear anymore  
   (D) able to appear
11. Pedro goes to the beach to look for a ______.
   A) sand crab
   B) lizard
   C) jagged rock
   D) sand dollar

12. When Pedro is at the beach, he rubs his special rock to bring him ______.
   A) a peso
   B) good luck
   C) some money
   D) a sea shell

13. What will probably happen next in the story?
   A) Leon will enjoy having Pedro on his team.
   B) The school bell will start to ring.
   C) Pedro’s grandmother will call him for dinner.
   D) Imelda will tell the teacher about Leon.
The Rat's Daughter
A Japanese Tale

Who will the rat's daughter marry?

The rat knew that his daughter was the most beautiful creature in the world. So, when the handsome young rat next door asked the rat for his daughter's hand in marriage, the rat said, "No, no, never! My beautiful daughter shall only marry the strongest one in the world."

And so the rat traveled to the place where the sun lives. "O mighty one!" said the rat. "I am looking for a husband for my daughter. She is so beautiful that she can only marry the strongest one in the world."

"You can't mean me," said the sun, "for there is one who is far stronger than I."

"Who could that be?" asked the rat. He could not imagine anyone stronger than the sun.

"The cloud," replied the sun. "The cloud covers my face and keeps my warmth from reaching the earth. The one you are looking for must be the cloud."

Then the rat traveled to see the cloud. "Greetings, great one!" said the rat. "I am searching for a husband for my daughter, who is the most beautiful rat in the world. This husband must be the most powerful one of all."

"You couldn't possibly mean me," laughed the cloud, "for the smallest puff of wind sends me sailing across the sky. You must be looking for the wind."
The rat hurried off to the home of the wind. When he got there, he said, "Mighty Wind, I am looking for a suitable husband for my daughter, the loveliest rat in the world. This husband must, like yourself, be the strongest of all."

"Me?" demanded the wind. "Oh, no, there is one who is far, far stronger than I."

"Who is that?" asked the rat. He was tired from all his traveling.

"It is the stone wall. The stone wall stops me dead in my tracks. The one you seek has to be the stone wall."

The rat traveled until he saw a high stone wall. "Oh, admirable Stone Wall!" the rat said. "I am looking for a suitable husband for my daughter, the world's loveliest rat. This husband, like yourself, must be the strongest one of all."

"Then it is not me that you seek," replied the stone wall, "for a creature far more powerful than I is right now, this very minute, destroying me, gnawing and chewing away at my very foundations ... the rat is far stronger than I."

"Thank you," said the rat. He returned home to announce the marriage of his lovely daughter to the handsome young rat next door, who was, it seemed, the strongest creature of all. And it was he that his daughter had wanted to marry all along.
15. The rat wanted his daughter to marry someone who was ________.
   a. kind
   b. funny
   c. strong
   d. wise

16. The rat traveled to see the cloud because ________.
   a. his daughter didn't like the sun
   b. the sun said the cloud was stronger
   c. his daughter wanted to marry the cloud
   d. the cloud had asked to marry his daughter

17. Where did the rat go after he spoke to the stone wall?
   a. to where the sun lives
   b. to the home of the wind
   c. back to his home
   d. next door

18. Read this sentence from the story.
   This husband must be the most powerful one of all.
   In this sentence, the word powerful means ________.
   a. strong
   b. handsome
   c. clever
   d. rich
19. This passage is most like a __________.
   A. folktale  
   B. true story  
   C. mystery  
   D. poem  

20. Pedro in "Pedro and the Magic Dollar" and the father rat in "The Rat's Daughter" both have to ________.
   A. play a game  
   B. solve a problem  
   C. find someone strong  
   D. pay money to someone  

21. "The Rat’s Daughter" is different from the other two passages you read because it ________.
   A. describes true events  
   B. couldn’t really happen  
   C. has characters that talk  
   D. takes place in the future
Appendix B

Samples of Non-treatment Lesson Plans
Guided Reading Lesson Plan for Thursday 2/17/05

Objective: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to correctly complete a graphic organizer of character development to utilize reading comprehension skills.

Introduction:
- Ask students if they have ever been to a major league baseball game.
- Let them briefly describe the experience.
- Explain that today's story takes place at a baseball game.
- Hand out books (The Subway Series by David McCoy.)
- Let students peruse the cover, title, chapter titles, illustrations, etc.

Development:
- State that the purpose for today's silent reading is to pay close attention to Kevin's character.
- Hand out the graphic organizer and have students fill out the first circle with Kevin's name while I model it on the board.
- Have students read pgs. 2-5.
- Ask students a comprehension question and fill out the second and third circle while I model it on the board.
- Have students read pgs. 6-10.
- Make a text to self connection between the characters and the students.
- Have students read pgs. 11-16.
- Have students fill out the fourth circle while I model it on the board.

Summary and Evaluation:
- Explain how Kevin changed throughout the story by looking at the graphic organizer.
- Tell students that next week we will be rereading the story with a different purpose. (We will be comparing and contrasting Kevin and Andy.)

Materials: books (5 copies), graphic organizer, white board, markers
Guided Reading Lesson Plan for Monday 2/21

Objective: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to show reading comprehension of an informative text by successfully completing a K-W-L chart with at least three items in each column.

Introduction:
- Have students preview story.
- Have students make predictions regarding what the story will be about.
- Tell students that the story is about the life and work of Ben Franklin, particularly Poor Richard's Almanac.
- Tell students we will make a K-W-L Chart.
- Create a chart on the board, filling in the "K" and "W" columns. (Have students make the chart in their books.

Development:
- Have students read pgs. 2-6.
- Fill in the chart.
- Have students read pgs. 7-16.
- Fill in the rest of the chart.

Summary and Evaluation:
- Go through the chart and look to see if we learned everything we wanted to learn.
- If not, invite students to find answers independently for next week's session.
Guided Reading Lesson Plan for Monday 2/28

Objective: At the end of the lesson, students will be able to correctly complete a problem / solution chart on *The Best Thanksgiving Ever*.

Introduction:
- Ask students what they know about pioneer life.
- Have students preview the story.
- Have students create a character / problem / solution chart in notebook.

Development:
- Have students read pgs. 2-4.
- As a group, fill in the character block.
- Ask “Why is Josh frustrated?”
- Fill in problem block.
- Ask “How does Dad make him feel better?”
- Fill in solution block.
- Have students read pgs. 5-9.
- Ask “Why is the type written two different ways?”
- Ask “Who are the main characters in Maggie’s journal?”
- Ask “What is the problem?”
- Fill in the chart.
- Have students read pgs. 10-16.
- Fill in solution block to complete the chart.
- Ask “What is pioneer life like?”
- Ask “Why does Maggie think that was the best Thanksgiving ever?”

Summary and Evaluation:
- Check to see that students correctly completed the chart in their notebooks and that each student had a chance to contribute significantly to the conversation.

Materials: 5 copies of *The Best Thanksgiving Ever*, notebooks, pencils, dry erase board, markers
Appendix C

Treatment Pretest and Post-test
It's Lily's first day at a new school. As she walks into the room, Miss Flores tells her, "Welcome to San Antonio, Texas." Then Miss Flores says, "Children, get into your groups. Later, I will tell you a surprise!" Everybody is excited.

Lily looks at the board. She sees a new word: *casca-ro-nes*. Each group begins sharing ideas.
The teacher tells Lily’s group to help Lily learn about cascarones. “Lily, ask them lots of questions,” she says.

Lily is curious. “Well, what are cascarones?” she asks the group.

Howie says, “You crack them on your friends’ heads.”

“Oh!” Lily says in surprise. “But what do they look like?”

“A cascarón is an eggshell,” says Sara. “Cascarón is a Spanish word. We are going to paint cascarones.” She shows Lily a picture.

Tomás says, “I am going to dye my eggs, instead. That’s how we do it at home.”

“After we decorate the cascarones, we let them dry. See the tiny hole on the top? We put confetti in there!” says Jenny. “Then we cover the hole with a little piece of colored tissue paper.”

“So cascarones are decorated eggshells with confetti inside?” asks Lily.

“Right!” says the group.
Lily still wants to know more. "Why do you crack them on your friends' heads?"

Jenny answers, "Because it's a way to meet people at a fiesta."

"Yeah, and to celebrate Easter," adds Howie. "I like chasing my cousins to crack cascarones."

"I like to surprise my dad!" says Tomás.

"They don't get mad?" asks Lily.

"No," says Sara, "it's fun to get confetti all over your head!"

Lily asks, "So where did cascarones come from?"

"We did a Web search," says Howie. "People say that the explorer Marco Polo brought back decorated..."
eggs from Asia.” The children show Lily pictures of beautiful decorated eggs.
Sara continues, “The people of Italy liked the beautiful eggs because they had surprises inside.”
“What were the surprises?” asks Lily.
“Some had perfume and some had jewels. The idea spread to countries like France and Spain,” says Jenny. “We also read that an emperor’s wife, named Carlotta, gave the idea of the cascarón to the Mexican people. People started making cascarones to celebrate fiestas.”
Then Miss Flores says, “It’s time to begin decorating our cascarones. We will share them with the other classes. To celebrate how much we have learned, we are going to have a fiesta!”
Lily smiles. She is going to like this class.
Directions: Fill in the circle in front of the correct answer for each question.

1. Where does this story take place?
   - A in Asia
   - B in Italy
   - C at a Mexican fiesta
   - D in a Texas classroom

2. Why does Miss Flores tell Lily to ask lots of questions?
   - A so Lily will guess the surprise
   - B so Lily will learn what cascarones are
   - C so Lily will learn about the new school
   - D so Lily will learn answers for a test

3. The students teach Lily that cascarón is a Spanish word for __________
   - A jewel
   - B fiesta
   - C eggshell
   - D confetti
4. Read this sentence from the story.
Howie says, "You crack them on your friends' heads."
In which sentence does the word crack mean the same thing as in the sentence above?
A The dish will crack if I hit it.
B We hope we can crack the mystery.
C Please open the window a crack.
D Watch the cowboy crack the whip.

5. Why did the people of Italy like decorated eggs?
A They liked to celebrate fiestas.
B The eggs helped them to meet people.
C The eggs had perfume and jewels inside.
D They liked to look at the beautiful pictures.

6. Which is the best summary of this story?
A Lily learns that her class will decorate cascarones and share them with other classes.
B Lily goes to a new school, learns what cascarones are and how to make them, and smiles when she learns that her class will have a fiesta.
C Lily goes to a new school, and Miss Flores tells her to ask her group lots of questions.
D Lily learns that the explorer Marco Polo brought back eggs from Asia.
7. Describe what cascarones are for someone who has never seen them. Use details from the story to help with your description.
Cascarones are bright-colored eggshells filled with confetti. Their purpose? To break over your friends' and family's heads, speckling their hair and clothing with hundreds of tiny paper dots. Cracking cascarones is a fun thing to do at fiestas.
What you’ll need to make 12 cascarones:

1. Tap the small end of an egg with a push pin. Carefully chip until you have a round 1-inch hole.

2. Shake the raw egg into a bowl. Wash the eggshell with soap and water, rinse, and set in the carton to dry.

3. Scoop confetti into the empty dry shell until it is half full. Draw a thin line of glue around the outside edge of a tissue circle. Place the tissue over the opening of the eggshell and press the glued edge to the eggshell.

4. Decorate the eggshell with markers. Now your cascarón is ready to use.
8. This passage is most like a __________.
   A) folktale  
   B) poem  
   C) set of directions  
   D) fantasy story

9. The push pin is used to __________.
   A) punch confetti out of paper  
   B) chip holes in the eggshells  
   C) draw a thin line in the tissue  
   D) make a design on the shells

10. Before putting confetti in the eggshells, you need to __________.
    A) put glue on the tissue  
    B) color them with markers  
    C) make sure the shells are dry  
    D) place the tissue over the opening
11. Read these sentences from the passage.

Their purpose? To break over your friends’ and family’s heads, speckling their hair and clothing with hundreds of tiny paper dots.

Which word has about the same meaning as speckling?

A) dotting
B) washing
C) tangling
D) smearing

12. In “Make Your Own Cascarones,” the passage says to decorate the eggshells **last**. When does the story say to decorate the eggshells in “Lily Learns About Cascarones”?

A) after putting the confetti inside
B) before putting the confetti inside
C) before shaking the raw egg out
D) after putting the tissue on the hole
How Rabbit Lost His Tail
a Micmac Folktale

What happens to Rabbit's tail?

Long, long ago, when the Earth was young, Rabbit was a very special animal. He was helpful, friendly, and handsome, and had a long, bushy tail. The other animals chose Rabbit to be the guide of the forest. His job was to help anyone who became lost in the dark woods.

One day, Rabbit was resting in a shady spot among the trees. As he sat admiring his beautiful tail, a young Indian man approached. He looked very sad and tired. He sat down near Rabbit and began to cry.

"Why are you crying?" asked Rabbit.

"I was on my way to be married in a distant village," said the Indian. "But now I am lost. If I don't find my way, I may be too late. My bride-to-be may change her mind and marry someone else."

"Don't worry," said Rabbit, who stood up quickly and brushed off his tail. "I will help you find the village in time for your wedding. Just keep your eye on my tail." He began to lead the young man through the forest. He knew the forest well and often got ahead, but the Indian kept Rabbit's tail in sight.

Soon the Indian began to tire again. At a turn in the trail, he stumbled and fell into a deep hole. He shouted to Rabbit.
Rabbit heard the Indian's cries and turned around. When he reached the hole, he peered in. "Try jumping," he said to the young man.

"I am not a rabbit," said the man. "I cannot jump high like you can. Surely I will lose my bride now."

"Wait," said Rabbit, who did not like to give up. He turned around and lowered his beautiful tail into the hole. "Grab my tail, and I will pull you out," he said.

So the Indian grabbed, and Rabbit began to pull. Slowly, he lifted the man out of the hole. Just as the man reached the top, Rabbit's tail broke off.

"Never mind," said Rabbit, "we don't have time to worry about my tail. We must hurry to the village." And they rushed off down the trail.

They arrived just in time. The bride was almost ready to give up. Now she smiled with happiness. When she heard the story of their adventure, she invited Rabbit to the ceremony. Rabbit felt sad about losing his tail, but he brushed the little stump as best he could and got ready for the celebration.

From then on, rabbits have always had short tails.
13. When does this story take place?
   A the time we live in now
   B in the future
   C thousands of years ago
   D about ten years ago

14. Rabbit's job was to help ________
   A Indians who got tired
   B anyone who was lost
   C animals who fell into holes
   D people who wanted to get married

15. Why was the young Indian man sad?
   A No one would marry him.
   B He was afraid to get married.
   C He was too young to get married.
   D He was lost on his way to get married.

16. Read this sentence from the story.
    At a turn in the trail, he stumbled and fell into a deep hole.
    Which word has about the same meaning as stumbled?
    A tripped
    B jumped
    C danced
    D turned
17. Which of these happened last in the story?
   A) Rabbit rested in a shady spot in the forest.
   B) Rabbit used his tail to help the man out of a hole.
   C) A young Indian man approached Rabbit.
   D) Rabbit ran ahead of the young man along the trail.

18. The bride invited Rabbit to the wedding because she wanted to ____________
   A) brush his tail
   B) see the forest
   C) hear his stories
   D) thank him

19. How are the endings of “Lily Learns About Cascarones” and “How Rabbit Lost His Tail” the same?
   A) The main character loses something.
   B) There is going to be a celebration.
   C) The characters chase each other.
   D) There is a lesson about nature.

20. In all three passages you read, you can learn something about ____________
    A) another culture
    B) Indian stories
    C) making a craft
    D) joining a class
21. What lesson did Rabbit learn in this story? Use details from the story to explain your answer.
Appendix D

Samples of Treatment Lesson Plans
Literature Circle Lesson Plans for the Week of March 21, 2005

Literature Circles - Monday
Focus Skills - Roles of literature circles
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Response - Class read-aloud of Chap 1
Homework - read chap 2 and prepare to discuss

Literature Circles - Tuesday
Focus Skills - Roles of literature circles
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Response - Discussion of Chap 2 and class read-aloud of Chap 3.
Homework - Read chap 4 and prepare to discuss

Literature Circles - Wednesday
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Activity - Discussion of Chap 4 and class read-aloud of Chap 5
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Homework - Read chap 6 and prepare to discuss

Literature Circles - Thursday
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Activity - Discussion of Chap 6 and Read aloud of Chap 7
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Literature Circle Lesson Plans for the Week of March 21, 2005

Literature Circles - Monday
Focus Skills - Roles of literature circles
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Response - Class read-aloud of Chap 1
Homework – read chap 2 and prepare to discuss

Literature Circles - Tuesday
Focus Skills - Roles of literature circles
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Response - Discussion of Chap 2 and class read-aloud of Chap 3.
Homework – Read chap 4 and prepare to discuss

Literature Circles - Wednesday
Objective - Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Activity – Discussion of Chap 4 and class read-aloud of Chap. 5
Materials - The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Homework – Read chap 6 and prepare to discuss

Literature Circles - Thursday
Objective – Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to take on roles of literature circles.
Activity – Discussion of Chap 6 and Read aloud of Chap. 7
Materials – The Hundred Dresses, role cards
Literature Circle Lesson Plans for the Week of April 4, 2005

Literature Circles - Monday
Objective – Students will choose a book, form groups, and understand how the groups will run this week.
Activity – Give a brief book talk on the four choices and review roles and student evaluation
Response – Students will write their book choice and groups will be formed.

Literature Circles - Tuesday
Students will break into groups, carry out their roles and discuss last night’s readings

Literature Circles – Wednesday
Students will break into groups, carry out their roles and discuss last night’s readings

Literature Circles – Thursday
Students will break into groups, carry out their roles and discuss last night’s readings

Literature Circles – Friday
Students will break into groups, carry out their roles and discuss last night’s readings
Appendix E

Literature Circle Role Cards
DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

Develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this section. Don’t worry about the small details; your task is to help the people in your group talk over the big ideas in the reading and share their reactions.

You are also in charge of the circle on the meeting day. It is your job to keep everyone on task and to call on the different members to share their part with the group.

SUMMARIZER

Prepare a 1-2 paragraph summary of today’s reading. Your summary must be written neatly in complete sentences. During the meeting, give a one or two minute statement that conveys the key points of the chapter.

TRAVEL TRACER

Follow the characters in this chapter and chart where things are happening and how the setting may have changed. Be prepared to describe each setting in detail.
CONNECTOR

Find connections between the book your group is reading and the outside world. Connect the reading to your own life, to things that happen at school or home, to similar events at other times or places in history, to other people or problems that you are reminded of, or to other books.

LITERARY LUMINARY

Locate a few special sections of the text that you will point out to the group. The idea is to help people remember something interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important from this section of the book. You will read the passage or paragraph aloud and the group will discuss.

CHARACTER EXAMINER

Choose at least two characters from the story and find adjectives to describe them. Find support from the story to back you up. Share your character examination and support with the group. Remember that characters can change. A character may be generous in one chapter but selfish in the next chapter.
Dear Parents,

Today your child started Literature Circles in place of our Guided Reading time. Literature Circles involve having students select books to read, then get together in groups to discuss them. Each student is assigned a role in the Literature Circles. The roles are as follows:

**Discussion Director** - Basically runs the group that day. The Discussion Director comes prepared with questions for the group to talk about.

**Summarize** - Prepares 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the nights reading and brings out key points in the chapter.

**Travel Tracer** - The role follows the setting changes in the chapter and writes them down.

**Connector** - The Connector relates their life events to something in the chapter. The Connector can also connect to something in the news or another book that they have read.

**Literary Luminary** - This role finds something interesting, funny or puzzling for the chapter.

**Character Examiner** - chooses at least 2 characters and finds adjectives to describe them. The Character Examiner focuses on if the character changes over the time.

Each night your child will be responsible to read the assigned pages. Your child’s book will be in a plastic envelope with their role for the night. Your child is expected to be prepared for their role. They will receive a daily grade for preparation. All writing will be kept in their Reading Composition books and complete sentences and paragraphs are expected. Please discuss the book with your child each night.

Sincerely,
Miss Anderson

-------------------------- Cut and return tomorrow --------------------------

I have read the above material about Literature Circles, and know my child will be responsible for reading each night. This work directly effects my child’s reading grade.

Child's name

Parent’s signature
Dear Parents,

Today your child brought home their new book for Literature Circles. Pages are assigned each night for tomorrow’s reading. Your child will receive a reading grade each day for preparation and participation. There is no reason your child doesn’t understand their discussion role, because they were modeled over a five day period. Again I’ve enclosed the roles for you to keep in a safe place. The roles are as follows:

**Discussion Director** - Basically runs the group that day. The Discussion Director comes prepared with questions for the group to talk about.

*To receive an A for the day* - At least 4 open-ended questions with your response written in complete sentences under the question. If you can’t write 1-2 sentences, it is not an open-ended question.

**Summarize** - Prepares 1-2 paragraphs summarizing the nights reading and brings out key points in the chapter.

*To receive an A for the day* - At least two well written paragraphs including characters, setting and main events.

**Travel Tracer** - The role follows the setting changes in the chapter and writes them down.

*To receive an A for the day* - Must write about each character and where they go in sentence form.

**Connector** - The Connector relates their life events to something in the chapter. The Connector can also connect to something in the news or another book that they have read.

*To receive an A for the day* - Must write at least one well written paragraph that makes a connection from the text to self, text to the world, or text to another text you have read.

**Literary Luminary** - This role finds something interesting, funny or puzzling for the chapter.

*To receive an A for the day* - Must choose at least 3 examples of something that stood out to you and write at least 2 sentences explaining why. You must also have the page number and mark the text with the post-it strips provided.

**Character Examiner** - chooses at least 2 characters and finds adjectives to describe them. The Character Examiner focuses on if the character changes over the time.

*To receive an A for the day* - Must choose at least 2 characters and write at least one well written paragraph on the character. You must also have the page number where you find that the character might be selfish, clever or maybe kind. Mark that section of the text with the post-it strips provided.

As a parent you need to sign that you saw the work completed for the next day in their Reading Composition books. A note will be sent home if we feel your child was not prepared for the day and you know their reading grade was affected.

*To receive an A for the day* during the book discussion you must enthusiastically participate and offer insightful thoughts and opinions.

Sincerely,
Miss Anderson

------------------------------------ Cut and return tomorrow ------------------------------

I have read the above material about Literature Circles, and know my child will be responsible for reading each night and writing in their Reading Composition books. This work directly effects my child’s reading grade.

Child’s name ________________________________

Parent’s signature ________________________________
Appendix G

Literature Circle Observation Form and Assessment Rubric
# Literature Circles

**Book Title**

<table>
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</table>

**Literature Circle Roles**

- DD - Discussion Director
- S - Summarizer
- TT - Travel Tracer
- CE - Character Examiner
- C - Connector
- LL - Literary Luminary

**Literature Circle Rubric**

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<th>Score</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Did not participate in the discussion even when asked</td>
<td>Didn't prepare for the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seldom participated but only offered 1-2 thoughts throughout the group</td>
<td>Somewhat prepared but did not complete parts of the role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Often participated but insights were not directly related (&quot;I think the same as...&quot;)</td>
<td>Prepared for their role, all parts completed but not role's expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Often participated and offered some good insights and made good connections</td>
<td>Thoughtfully prepared for their role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Enthusiastically participated and offered insightful thoughts and opinions without dominating group</td>
<td>Very thorough went above the outlined expectations</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Appendix H

Literature Circle Interview Questions and Likert Scale
1. Do you think literature circles made reading more enjoyable to you?

2. Do you think having a role in literature circles made you better prepared to discuss the book?

3. Do you think having a role in literature circles helped you to better understand what you were reading?

4. Did you like having a student lead the discussion rather than a teacher?

5. Is choosing your own book important to you?
Appendix I

Samples of Student Work in Literature Circles
Super Fudge 5/2/23

This is what happened in chapter 9 and 10 of Super Fudge. First, Fudge made a new friend, Daniel, who came over. I don't think Peter liked him very much. Next, Tootsie learned how to crawl. The whole family loved it. Then later, Tootsie learned to stand. Now that Tootsie could crawl like Turtle, Turtle and Tootsie became friends by chasing each other around the room. Then the next day, Jimmy Fargo came over to visit. Alex met Jimmy and Alex was jealous of Jimmy because Peter
was spending more time with Jimmy and met with him. When Jimmy and Alex left Peter's house, Peter's dad said that he was going to open a new restaurant. He said he was going to call it "The A to Z of Chinese Cooking."

Finally Christmas came and Fudge, Peter, Turtle, and Tootsie all got presents on Christmas. That's what happened in chapters 9 and 10 of Super Fudge.
1. Why didn't Peter want to have
   a new sibling?
   Peter didn't want to have a new
   sibling because he did not want
   it to be like his brother.

2. Why did Peter think he would
   have another Fudge as his new
   sibling? Peter thought he would
   get another Fudge because he
   had bad luck and everything
   was going wrong.
3. Why did Fudge annoy Peter?

Fudge annoyed Peter because Fudge wants to get his family's attention.

4. Do you think the new baby will be like Fudge? Will it be like Peter, or will it be like someone else. I think the baby will be its own person.
1. Why did Fudge say he saw Uriah?
   because Fudge is imaginative
2. who did Fudge really see on the stage?
   someone imaginative
3. Why did Fudge discribe the principal?
   because he was trying to be funny
4. Why did Fudge wake Peter up on saturday?
   because he was trying to be funny
5. Why did Alex and Peter want to have a picnic?
   they were bored
6. Why does Fudge ask crazy questions?
   he wants to
7. Why did Fudge and Daniel run away?
   they wanted to be alone
8. I really like this book.
I thought that when he was funny
when the monkey sang, I also thought it
was funny when the monkey put
water in the pelly's mouth. I thought
that the giraffe's neck was interesting
because her neck could go higher and
higher. I think the book was
really interesting.
Summerizer #105

One day a little boy was walking he saw a building it was once a sweet shop. He saw a bathtub fall and a rocking horse fall on the ground. The next day he came back the door was changed and he called everybody home the window opened and another window opened it was a pelican. On the window it said window cleaning company. The little boy did not know what it meant. Then a monkey came out of the window dancing the boy danced in return.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pussiling</th>
<th>Interesting</th>
<th>Powerful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That Peggie now wants to visit Wanda, didn't do Wanda moved just anything.</td>
<td>Maddie wants to visit Wanda was studying, thou' she the note. because people called her name. Both Peggie Wanda didn't and Maddie move because thinks she her class and when nothing did not move she.</td>
<td>The teacher thinks that Juke moved. Peggie knew revolved around how it fell Maddie's class for Wanda, but she bullied Wanda.</td>
</tr>
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</table>