

# Book Clubs and Peer Discussion Groups

## **Purpose:**

To help students develop their text understanding; to foster the construction and extension of meaning.

## **Procedure:**

1. Groups are usually small—4-6 students. Students can self-select groups (the teacher may want to “book talk” the titles or provide time for students to peruse books), or the teacher can assign them. Possible models for organizing texts and readers are (adapted from Fountas & Pinnell, 2001):

- Whole group, same text: Students read or listen to the same text. Whole group formulates questions for discussion. Small groups meet to discuss, make notes, and report back to the whole group.

- Small group, same text: Teacher “book talks” several titles. Students select titles of interest, and groups are formed. Groups may plan a culminating activity (readers theater, drama, technology) to share with whole group.

- Small group, different texts: Students choose from a variety of different texts that have something in common (e.g., strong characters; genre, such as biography; same author; issues, such as coming-of-age or race relations; content area study, such as Civil War books or books about hurricanes). Groups may be formed somewhat randomly. Students read their individual titles. Group discussions focus on the common element (e.g., characterization, qualities of a biography, etc.). Teacher plans a culminating activity to summarize/ synthesize all group discussions.

2. Group discussions should be held at least 2-3 times per week. Students read/ listen to text before the discussion group assembles and may want to prepare for the discussions by making notes, writing in response journals, using sticky notes to mark places in the text for discussion, etc.

3. Students may want to assume roles for discussions. The first two roles on the following list should probably be part of every discussion, even those that do not make use of other roles (i.e., where students’ discussion focuses on predetermined questions or is open-ended). Other roles may vary. Students should select their roles before reading/ listening to the text.

- Group Leader: leads discussion, encourages participation, keeps track of time
- Summarizer: begins discussion with summary of text read/ listened to
- Comparer: compares text to other text(s)
- Connector: compares text to other non-text people, events.
- Sentence Finder: finds and shares interesting sentences
- Word Finder: finds and shares interesting words
- Questioner: finds and shares unresolved issues
- Predictor: leads discussion about upcoming portions of the text

**Evaluation:**

Initially, in-process evaluation may focus on qualities of effective discussions. Teacher may observe and make notes of students' contributions, understanding. Journal entries may be read for evidence of understanding. Culminating activities may be evaluated. Post-reading tasks may be used to evaluate students' construction and extension of meaning.

**For More Information**

Daniels, Harvey. (2002). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in book clubs and reading groups* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Fountas, Irene, and Pinnell, Gay Su. (2001). *Guiding readers and writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

McMahon, Susan, and Raphael, Taffy. (Eds.). (1997). *The book club connection: Literacy learning and classroom talk*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Noe, Katherine, and Johnson, Nancy. (1999). *Getting started with literature circles*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon.