

LITERATURE CIRCLES IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SETTING:
AN INQUIRY FROM COMPREHENSION TO SYNTHESIS

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DEDICATION

To my grandparents:

men and women of amazing strength and pillars of knowledge

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the efficacy of literature circles in a high school English classroom setting. Specifically, the purpose of this is to determine if literature circles improve reading comprehension and student involvement in reading and class discussions. As a sub-inquiry of this study, it is the purpose of this researcher to determine if the prescribed roles often used as guidelines for literature circles create perfunctory responses in small group discussions, and if incorporating aspects of comprehension strategies improves the content of discussions as well as student reading comprehension. Literature circles used in the process of this study examined both fictional material and non-fiction material. This aspect of the study discusses the differences in instructional strategies and efficacy of literature circles between the genres.

The participants involved in this study were high school seniors from four different classrooms. The classes were heterogeneously composed of high, medium and low level reading abilities, as indicated on previous tests, including the Kansas State Reading Assessment given during their junior year of study. In addition to reading abilities, motivational levels were assessed through an initial survey. Two classes were assigned as the control group—receiving instruction using primarily direct instructional practices—and two classes were assigned as the experimental group—receiving instruction through literature circles and small group discussions. The two groups, though the instructional strategies varied, covered the same material. Both groups had the same learning objectives and were assessed using the same tools.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a day and age when standards, benchmarks, and test results are being emphasized, there is a growing concern among educators regarding the best methods and practices of instruction. The No Child Left Behind Legislation has made not only legislators, but administrators, teachers, and parents more concerned about what raises student achievement in the classroom. With these notions of best practices and assessment in mind, the following was designed.

Statement of the Problem

My initial goal as an English teacher was to create life-long readers—to inspire in the students a passion for reading. After teaching for a few years, however, this goal has become a mass of curriculum and content expectations, school improvement plans, and various assessments that go hand-in-hand with teaching at the high school level. Because of the content-heavy curriculum and thousands of pages of texts to cover, students did one (or more) of the following: they ran to the internet or other source for summaries of the text; asked siblings and friends about the texts, hoping to tap on the knowledge of former students; or, sloughed off the reading entirely and wait for spoon-fed responses from the teacher. Students used these strategies in order to pass quizzes and tests, and not out of a genuine interest in the subject-matter. Only rarely were the students actually reading the material, even in the face of quizzes and tests.

In truth, the students thought of the reading assignments as fact-gathering missions, rarely taking the time to examine the implications or deeper meanings

of the text. They would read for basic plot points and would often miss the bigger picture the author was trying to convey. Only with long wait times and awkward silences could I pull deeper meanings from my students in our class discussions, and the responses typically came from a select few students. When it came time to test the material, students often performed well on simple, plot-based multiple choice questions, but when asked to develop ideas and to apply meanings of the text in short answer questions and essays, they would either regurgitate responses given during class or summarize the plot; they failed to synthesize the theme or the cultural implications of the material.

Compounded with their poor performance on classroom tests in English, when the results of the Kansas State Assessment in Reading were returned to our school in the spring of 2005, our students (my junior English students) failed to meet the State Standard of Excellence in Reading. Previously, during the 2003-2004 school year, juniors had performed quite well on the Reading Assessment—reaching the State Standard of Excellence, but it was clear that something had to change in the way I was conducting my English classroom discussions, as well as my expectations for student comprehension and higher level thinking. As documented by the State Assessments, students were unable to identify and give possible reasons for bias in persuasive writing, and they were unable to adequately infer deeper meanings of the text beyond the printed material.

Need for the Study

After discussing possible reasons for their failure to perform on the State Assessments with administrators and colleagues in my department, I began to look into various best practices in education to determine ways to improve my own teaching strategies. Although I had previously used collaborative groups for the discussion of books, short stories and other texts in my class, I kept finding research about literature circles as an effective means of getting students to discuss aspects of material beyond plot and basic comprehension. Several studies documented increased involvement in group discussion (Lloyd, 2004; Noe & Johnson, 1999; Simpson, 1994; Tovani, 2004), as well as improvement in students' abilities to go beyond the basic factual aspects of the texts. It was documented that students began to apply the text to their own lives in order to make deeper connections. Many of the studies, however, did not involve students beyond the fifth grade level; in fact, the majority of studies involved in literature circles as a reading strategy were conducted in primary school classrooms (kindergarten through second grade).

Definition of Terms

Literature Circles

Also known as reading groups, book clubs, and reading circles. At their most basic level, literature circles are small group discussions between five to seven students about a text; the text can be a book that the group has chosen to read as a whole or can be various texts that center on a specific theme the group has chosen to explore. Most frequently, the teacher gives students the option to

choose between eight and ten books, then the teacher groups students based on their book preferences. Students involved in literature circles are often assigned roles, and these include (but are not limited to) Discussion Director, Illustrator, Literary Luminator and Connector (Daniels 1994). In order to facilitate group discussions, students can be given worksheets or other means of recording to focus their individual and group work. Likewise, students' roles vary from meeting to meeting so that all students have the ability to participate fully and in different ways during each of the discussions.

Rubric

Rubrics are task-specific assessment tools which define expected criteria; they can be used at the on-set of an assignment or discussion to give students a clear understanding of what skills need to be mastered, during the assignment or discussion to help focus the students' performance, and at the end of the assignment or discussion to assess the students' mastery of the set criteria. Rubrics are often teacher generated and can be written specifically to address relevant criteria for the assignment, and they offer an objective way to assess otherwise subjective responses.

Scaffolding

Scaffolding is a term which refers to how skills are taught and transferred from one task to the next. Scaffolding is an instructional strategy which allows teachers to model the transference of one skill (already mastered by students) to a new skill set (a skill yet to be learned by the students).

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy is a term which refers to a hierarchy of thinking and characteristics thereof, which was determined by Benjamin Bloom. This taxonomy of terms refers to different skills mastered by students in a given subject-area, and can be broken down into the following categories—from lowest levels to the highest: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

These terms refer to students' varying abilities to understand and process material, and are organized from the simplest thinking processes to the more difficult, higher-level thinking skills.

Limitations

It is not the intent of the researcher to generalize to a broader population. This present study may not be representative of all twelfth-grade students who are involved with literature circles and book talks. This study may, however, be viewed as a useful model in the approach to improving reading comprehension and synthesis for students with both fiction and non-fiction texts.

Summary of the Study and Hypotheses

After reviewing various studies, I decided to try my hand at facilitating literature circles in my senior English classroom. Not only did I want to improve my students' abilities to read beyond the plot of texts, but I hoped to more actively engage a greater number of students in discussions, and improve their ability to comment thoughtfully on the texts. The incorporation of literature circles in my class seemed like an obvious way to accomplish several goals that I had

set for myself after my students' poor performance on the State Assessment in Reading. I would be able to track the quality of their discussions (inferences, synthesis, and application of the texts to their own lives), their level of comprehension, as well as their motivation in reading a chosen text. Not only did I want to track the changes in the above areas, but also it was my intent to look at the differences in student progress across genres—from fiction to non-fiction texts.

With these goals in mind, I designed this study to determine the efficacy of literature circles in a high school English classroom setting. Specifically, it is the purpose of this study to determine if literature circles improve reading comprehension and student involvement (or ownership) in reading and class discussions. As a sub-inquiry of this study, it is my purpose to examine the prescribed roles often used as a guideline for literature circles. It is reported in some journals and research that these roles create perfunctory responses in small group discussions. Another aspect of inquiry in this study is to determine if giving students the opportunity to lead their literature circles without roles improves the content of discussions, as well as student reading comprehension. Literature circles used in the process of this study covered not only fiction, but non-fiction material as well. This aspect of the study discusses the differences in instructional strategies and efficacy of literature circles between genres.

Though the breadth of this study is expansive, the following narrower points are the hypotheses that the researcher has made:

1. By choosing their own materials to read, students will be more motivated to complete assigned reading, as well as be more involved in discussions regarding the text.
2. Students will be more likely to take ownership of discussions because they are involved in a smaller community of readers, and this improvement in the quality of discussion will allow students to begin making deeper connections to the text by using higher level thinking skills.
3. In their literature circles, students will use scaffolding skills to go beyond basic discussion of the text; they will be able to analyze and synthesize the text on a deeper level than those students not involved in a literature circle.
4. Students participating in literature circles will carry over the skills learned in comprehending fiction texts to non-fiction texts; therefore, student performance on State Assessments in Reading (released tests) will be improved from the previous year's performance.

In accordance with the above hypotheses, this thesis has been designed as follows. A detailed literature review follows this general introduction to the study, in which the researcher closely examines and defines literature circles, as well as instructional strategies for incorporating literature circles in the secondary English classroom. A brief discussion of the importance of cross-genre incorporation in literature circles is also given in order to justify the researcher's

final hypothesis. Student motivation in classroom settings, specifically reading, is discussed—noting ways to make an English classroom a literary oasis. After the literature review, a detailed account of the procedures used in this study is outlined, from classroom makeup and the results of the reading survey on motivation, to incorporation and modeling of literature circles in the classroom, to assessment. Results are discussed, including a detailed analysis of reading comprehension, student motivation and response quality, after which, limitations and implications for future studies are outlined. Finally, a discussion at the conclusion of this thesis attempts to provide a summation of findings and final reflections made by the researcher.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Literature Circles

Brabham & Villaume (2000) define skillful reading as “marked by an intimate engagement with the text” (p. 278). It is with this belief in mind that many educators attempt to incorporate literature circles into their classroom environment; it is an endeavor to create meaningful connections between the literature and students. Literature circles have been used for decades now (Peterson & Eeds, 1990), and have been used widely across the curriculum—not merely in reading classes, but also in history classes, as well as science. It is widely recognized, however, that literature circles (regardless of curriculum) are based on the following three, core elements: diversity of readers and texts; student choice in groups and texts; and student regulation of group goals, assignments and discussions (Daniels, 2002).

Originally, literature circles grew out of two very potent ideas in reading strategies: independent reading and collaborative groups (Daniels, 1994). The idea is that, as independent readers, students who choose their reading selection will be more inclined to tackle the text chosen by them. This is in opposition to the way many teachers find themselves teaching: assigning a single text to the entire class for general consumption and discussion. Student choice is a hallmark of literature circles, but it is coupled with an accepted (and heralded) means of educational strategies and best practices—collaborative groups. This

joining is based on the premise that “literacy is *socially* constructed and socially rooted” (Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde, 2005, p. 48).

Within literature circles, there are various roles, but in the creation and implementation of literature circles, there are two distinct roles: the teacher’s role and the students’ roles. While at the beginning of literature circles, the teacher takes an active role, instructing students in the conduct of literature circles and group work in the classroom, as the literature circles themselves develop, students gain more control over the way the literature circle is conducted. When planning for an implementation of literature circles, it is important for teachers to keep in mind that they will need to be flexible. Often, literature circles may take more time than traditional instruction because students must understand and become comfortable with the routine (Noe & Johnson, 1999). No longer do teachers directly instruct their students, but through literature circles, students are encouraged to discover the deeper meanings in the text, as well as their own individual connections to the literature.

This shift in instruction—from teacher-driven questioning to student-centered discussion—can be dramatic at first. Therefore, the teachers must use both modeling and scaffolding procedures to ease students into literature circles. First, in order for students to fully grasp what an open discussion will look like, it is helpful for teachers to model for their students. This can be done by inviting other teachers to model for the students, or by asking students already involved in a book group to demonstrate. Tovani (2004) points out that by modeling both expected and discouraged behaviors in a small group discussion, students will

have a better understanding of what a small group discussion is, as well as their responsibilities as a member of a small group. While Tovani (2004) demonstrated modeling of a small group discussion by asking a colleague to perform a brief discussion in front of the class, Lloyd accomplished this same objective by asking a group of students to perform what she calls a “fishbowl” activity. Students already involved in an established book discussion model for the class what their discussions look like. By showing students the roles and responsibilities of members in a literature circle, teachers are able to clearly define their expectations. Likewise, Tovani (2004) points out that by seeing the strategy modeled, students were more likely to be productive members in the literature circle when given the opportunity to share; they came to the meetings prepared with materials, were respectful of others’ comments, and often had notes and ideas ready to share.

While modeling is a vital aspect of teaching students how to perform in a literature circle, it is also important for teachers to scaffold. Brabham and Villaume (2000) note that scaffolding includes “conversations and interactions which temporarily support children’s development of more complex thought and language” (p. 279). The connection to literature circles here is clear; by supporting students through scaffolding, to come up with more complex ideas (ideas beyond the basic comprehension), students will be more likely to map those same skills in questioning when put in their literature circles. These abilities, to thoroughly question and delve deeper into the meanings of the text, are essential to successful literature circles (Au & Raphael, 1998). If students are

able to incorporate these new ideas and information effectively (after having learned the procedure from the teacher, through scaffolding), they will not be “mired down” in the regurgitation of old knowledge, but will rather begin adding to their knowledge through group discussion (Block & Pressley, 2002).

Once students have learned—from the modeling and scaffolding instruction—what a literature circle looks like, they will be ready to join a literature circle; there are several ways to begin literature circles in a classroom. However, it is vital for teachers to determine their own goals for literature circles before dividing students into groups based on their preferences (Noe et al., 1999). Even before modeling and scaffolding can begin, teachers need to determine if the books used in the circles will be based on student preference, by theme, or if the group will read the same texts together. Similarly, the teacher needs to decide which texts will be used: fiction or non-fiction. Typically, literature circles are used to discuss fiction texts, but a recent trend in reading has been to use literature circles for non-fiction texts as well, in order to help students develop their questioning skills in other genres (Ogle, Camille & Blachowicz, 2002). In making these decisions, Noe and Johnson (1999) stress the importance of flexibility. Whether it be in the content or the time frame of a literature circle, flexibility is key.

Once the basic guidelines of the literature circle have been determined, modeled, and general scaffolding has taken place, it is time for students to take over the literature circle; Harvey Daniels’ books on this subject—using literature circles in the reading classroom—have widely been used as templates for

instructors (1994, 2002). In these texts, Daniels uses role sheets to aid students (and instructors) in various aspects of the discussion. A defining characteristic of these roles is that they change from discussion to discussion; a student who is Discussion Director one week may be the Illustrator the next. The roles defined by Daniels can be for as few as four members in the group, and often include a Discussion Director, an Illustrator, a Literary Luminator (whose job it is to find pertinent passages in the text), and a Connector (whose job it is to make connections between the text and student life). For larger literature circles, variations on these roles can be made, as well as expanded; for example, there may also be a Summarizer, a Vocabulary Enricher, a Travel Tracer (who tracks the movement of the characters), and an Investigator (who finds material from other sources which are related to the text). These defined roles are especially helpful to students at the beginning of literature circles because they help students see how the roles are connected to the development of the discussion, and how the discussions can grow while at the same time focusing on the text. However, it is important to make sure the students use the scaffolding skills they learned to build beyond these roles in order to go beyond perfunctory responses sometimes generated within the confines of the role system (Lloyd, 2004).

Benefits of literature circles are various: they teach students how to think more critically about the texts they read (Daniels, 1994); they encourage reluctant readers and other students to have more intimate discussions with teachers and each other (Simpson, 1994); and literature circles support students' development of social consciousness (Noll, 1994). An added benefit with the

incorporation of literature circles, as Chia-Hui (2002) states, is that they also bridge gender gaps in classrooms; likewise, literature circles help engage students whose first language is not English by addressing their needs and abilities more specifically.

Major concerns with literature circles, however, have recently been brought to light by various reading coaches, researchers and teachers. Tovani (2004) points out that often students are reluctant to go beyond the designated roles assigned to them in standard literature circles. Similarly, Lloyd (2004) states that literature circles keep students from going beyond “perfunctory responses”. More specifically, because students are made to use roles on a regular basis for the means of structure, they begin to rely too heavily on the defined roles, instead of delving deeper into the text. An unfortunate side effect, after the widespread and general praise of literature circles, is that teachers often resort to “wholesale borrowing;” that is, using procedures which have been found to work effectively in some classrooms, without altering the procedures to truly fit their own classrooms and students (Brabham et al., 2000).

Fiction and Non-Fiction Applications

Though literature circles are typically used with fiction (Daniels, 1994; Lloyd, 2004; Tovani, 2004), they also have practical applications with non-fiction texts. This bridge of literacy skills is vital because, as Block and Pressley (2002) point out, the majority of reading done by adults is of informational, non-fiction texts. Adults often read manuals, newspapers, persuasive materials, and various other informational texts throughout their adult lives; being able to thoroughly

understand these texts is a key skill to be developed in school. Similarly, informational texts play a major role in many state assessments, and student performance on these tests is faltering (Block et al., 2002; Kansas Reading Assessment, Kapaun, 2004). By exposing students to various texts (both fiction and non-fiction), they will be given more opportunities to appreciate and experience reading different genres. Also, by organizing literature circles based on these new-found interests, students will begin to appreciate a diversity of perspectives.

One way to reach students with non-fiction, informational texts is to go outside of the textbook—to find supplemental materials in other sources. While full of information, high school English textbooks are often stuffy, cover a prohibitive amount of material, and can be written above grade level (or students' levels of reading and comprehension). Therefore, it is important to look for “accessible texts” (Tovani, 2004). Although finding supplemental and applicable texts does not always seem like a possibility, (especially with ever-increasing requirements from state and federal legislation in education) accessible texts can supplement the textbook. By going outside of the textbook and incorporating shorter, more manageable texts, not only will students feel more comfortable with the text, but they are likely to be more actively engaged in what they are reading (Lloyd, 2004). If students are actively engaged with the text, they will be more likely to look beyond the basic comprehension of the text and begin to question the author, make connections to their own lives, and join an on-going conversation with other students about the text (Block et al., 2002).

Student Motivation and Comprehension

With the local, state and federal focus on assessment, the question at the heart of this research is not only what makes students comprehend texts better, but what strategies teachers can use to motivate students to become better readers—readers who will more thoroughly engage with the text. In her article, “After Third Grade,” Gina Biancarosa (2005) notes that, according to the National Center for Education Studies, “more than two-thirds of US adolescents [are] struggling to read proficiently” (p. 19). Because of this staggering statistic, countless studies have been conducted on comprehension, as well as motivation, and some successful strategies have been presented, including programs like Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), using comprehension computer software, a whole-reading curriculum, graphic organizers, and a renewed emphasis in collaborative groups. Because of the importance of these issues, recent publications have devoted entire month’s publications to their discussion. For example, a recent publication of *Educational Leadership* (October 2005) outlined studies specific to upper elementary and secondary literacy strategies.

In their article, “Learning From What Doesn’t Work,” Ivey and Fisher (2005) review several situations that adversely affect student comprehension and motivation in most schools, and discuss ways to improve essential aspects of literacy instruction. According to their research, student motivation and reading comprehension are inextricably linked. One of the strategies that they address is whole-class reading, where all of the students are required to read the same text, regardless of their reading level. While this is a strategy used largely in

elementary and middle school literature classrooms, Ivey and Fisher (2005) point out that it may not be the most effective. Students spend less time interpreting the texts, and more time hurriedly completing packets of information regarding plot points and character identification. However, when given a large range of books—ranging both in reading level and genre of text—from which to make their selection, students are more likely to apply the information that they read to their own lives. “We are not saying that students shouldn’t read the great, enduring works of literature...we are simply wondering whether a whole class needs to read the same book at the same time and whether this practice tends to produce engaged, interested students who are extending their knowledge” (Ivey et al., 2005).

This notion that students should read age-appropriate texts is something that has guided both instruction and assessment for years. However, the one-size-fits-all mentality may not be the most beneficial for students who struggle reading material below their grade level, or educators who endeavor to engage readers and increase assessment scores. It is unlikely that a student who struggles to understand the text will be motivated to delve into the text for deeper meanings, let alone continue reading the text. By allowing students choices in the texts they read, students “develop their personal reflection, to free their creativity, to value their own worth as valid comprehension crafters,...and to interpret new ideas into the broader context in their own lives” (Block, 1999). Ultimately, improved reading comprehension and understanding is going to require students’ intrinsic interests to motivate them to read texts thoroughly and to make the most

meaning of the texts. It is going to take something beyond whole-class assigned reading and worksheets given by teachers.

Another way to direct student motivation and comprehension in the classroom, beyond simply allowing student choice, is to provide students with a wide variety of diverse texts, both in the classroom and in the library. As noted in a study by Guthrie, Schafer, Von Secker, and Alban (2000), teachers who have students with high reading scores and achievement are typically employing a wide range of both narrative and informational books in their classrooms. Not only do they offer students a wide range of materials to choose from, but they also offer texts spanning a wide range of difficulty levels; these difficulty levels allow students to choose texts that match their reading abilities. There is a direct relation between the number of texts made available to students and their level of achievement. This correlation is a result of tapping on students' interests; the more books they have to choose from, the more likely they are to find something that interests them, and the more likely they are to read. Ideally, the more students read, the more they will understand and be motivated to continue reading.

Giving students a forum wherein they can discuss these wide varieties of texts is yet another way to improve motivation and comprehension. As social beings, students are naturally inclined to discuss the texts that they have read, and collaborative groups are one of the ways that teachers can accomplish their goals of increased student motivation and comprehension, while at the same time catering to students' desires to discuss the texts. Collaborative groups

provide a structured setting for students to mingle their own interpretations and reflections with their peers' (Guthrie et al., 2000). Similarly, recent research with collaborative groups has demonstrated an improvement in both reading comprehension and achievement (Biancarosa, 2005). Another advantage of collaborative groups is that they also provide students with a larger prior knowledge base with which to connect to the literature they have read as a group (Pressley & Hilden, 2002). This prior knowledge allows for students to more actively relate the text to their own lives, and oftentimes encourages their continued reading and analysis.

Though several strategies exist for encouraging students to be more motivated readers, as well as readers who comprehend the texts they read, two such strategies which are consistently linked are student choice in reading and collaborative groups. It can be surmised, then, that incorporating the two above strategies in the reading classroom will increase student achievement and comprehension dramatically.

Assessment

Though many local, state and federal assessments are based on standardized tests, there are several other ways to assess student achievement and comprehension. In fact, it is the general consensus among researchers that standardized tests alone can not measure growth because they sacrifice validity for reliability (Strickland & Strickland, 1998). Ultimately, assessment should be tied closely to several aspects of instruction: the learner objectives and goals; regular classroom discussions and activities; and how the learner processes the

learning which occurs in the classroom (Tierney & Readence, 2000). Put more specifically, Kellough and Kellough (2003) state seven purposes and principles of assessment; according to their observations, assessment should act as: a means for student assistance; a focus on strengths and weaknesses in student performance; a gauge to determine the effectiveness of instructional strategies; a determination of the effectiveness of curriculum and teaching; a source of data collection for future decision making regarding student work; and a means of communication between parents, children and educators.

With these aspects of assessment in mind, the teacher can consider how alternative forms of measuring achievement (beyond standardized tests) should be used to determine student progress. Included in these alternative forms of assessment are portfolios, rubrics, observation, checklists, and self-evaluations, as well as both performance and authentic assessment. While each of these alternative forms has their merits, for the purposes of this study, a detailed description and definition of rubrics, observations and performance assessments will be discussed.

As assessment is intended to act as a support for learners, it is imperative that educators thoughtfully formulate their means of assessment, and that these assessments provide direction for students, as well as valuable feedback—before, during and after instruction; rubrics are one way to accomplish both of these elements inherent in assessment. The most advantageous aspect of rubrics is that they have the ability to characterize quality for students (Taylor, 2003). Likewise, rubrics have the ability to do two things at the same time: act

as the impetus for instruction, and measure student achievement. When the criteria for a specific assignment or project is clearly outlined for students at the beginning of the project, not only are the expectations made clear, but the rubric provides the students with a means for self-assessment during the completion of their project. Finally, rubrics help students and teachers determine the value and importance of individual tasks (Taylor, 2003). Another admirable aspect of rubrics is their ability to show students varying *degrees* of expected outcomes and quality (Kellough et al., 2003). While checklists and assignment sheets show students what is expected in the final product, a rubric gives them a more specific understanding of *how* they can reach higher levels of achievement.

If, as Gwynne Ash (2005) notes, many eighth through twelfth graders are unable to distinguish between and engage in the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (comparing, synthesizing, and analyzing), it is vital that rubrics be used to give students a better understanding of these terms in reading and discussion. Not only do rubrics give students a clear understanding of what is required, but rubrics also remind teachers to focus their teaching, and they remind students to focus their learning on specific criteria (Daniels & Bizar, 2005). By clearly defining expectations, students focus their attention (when working) on what has already been outlined by the teacher. If teachers can focus their expectations about reading and comprehension with rubrics, students will be able to go beyond literal meanings of the text in order to expand their comprehension of the text to synthesis and application, and students will be also learn to reflect on the author's intent (Ash, 2005). Not only can students more

effectively reflect and analyze their learning with rubrics, but teachers can more objectively and quickly assess student performance because the criteria has already been thoroughly established.

Rubrics are a tool of both performance assessments and observations, and are used so that students and teachers can appraise the value and quality of their (the students') performance (Winograd & Arrington, 1999). According to Winograd and Arrington (1999), performance assessments emphasize not only recall of plot points, but rather students' self-evaluation, understanding and growth. Instead of robotically recalling information for multiple choice and matching tests, performance assessments require students to *show* what they have learned; typically, performance assessments include elements of discovery, application, presentation and group work (Strickland et al., 1998).

Many educators note that performance assessments are well received by their students (Daniels et al., 2005; Taylor, 2003; Winograd et al., 1999), and some specific examples of how students responded to performance assessments are included in various studies. Specifically, performance assessments can include various ways for students to demonstrate their knowledge. Some examples of performance assessments include: skits or role play activities, journal responses, speeches or presentations, group work and discussions, as well as portfolios of student work. For many students, performance assessments provide an anxiety-free means of gauging their progress (Daniels et al., 2005). Likewise, performance assessments give students an opportunity to create unique and various representations of what

they have learned; when students do this, they appropriate the knowledge that they have gained. It should be noted here that performance assessments typically require the same (if not more) preparation and thought than standardized tests; most likely, this is because students must authentically represent what they have learned in an original product. Jean Baldikoski (2002) notes that her students enthusiastically responded to the performance assessment and *shared* in each others' learning more than if their assessment had been a paper-pencil test. Clearly, performance assessments offer many advantages for both teachers and students.

Student achievement can best be measured when the assessment tool mirrors the instructional methods used in class, and historically this “match” does not occur with standardized and basal tests (Zemelman, et al., 2005). For this reason, observations as assessment offer valuable feedback to students; observation stresses the essence of reading: comprehension. When teachers can observe and assess students' discussion, group work, and anecdotal records, they are able to provide more valuable feedback to students—more valuable than the scores generated by student performance on standardized tests. Through observation, teachers can gauge their students' understanding, comprehension and analysis of text; plus, observation gives teachers an opportunity to gauge the efficacy of their instructional strategies. If the observations indicate that students are having a difficult time with comprehension, analysis and synthesis of a text, teachers can reinforce the necessary skills to help students savor the reading that they have completed and

build the connections students need to be successful with future tasks (Zemelman, et al., 2005).

Another advantage of observations is that they help teachers establish patterns in their students' learning; plus, the feedback generated from observations helps students move forward with learning (Strickland et al., 1998). Ultimately, observation can be either systematic (with a rubric) or continuous, occurring daily and recorded through teacher notes and reflections. Because observations can be conducted formally (as a means of summative assessment) or informally (formative assessment), there are numerous opportunities for teachers to gain insight into their students' skills (Taylor, 2003). It is important to note, also, that observations can be used as a means of performance assessment; for example, students' discussions and group work can be observed in order to gauge understanding, comprehension and synthesis. Research clearly indicates that alternative means of assessment must occur in the classroom, and observations, performance assessments and rubrics are three ways in which this alternative measurement can occur.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The School and Participants

Subjects for this study were selected from the population of high school seniors (grade 12) in four English classes at Kapaun Mt. Carmel Catholic High School in Wichita, Kansas. Kapaun Mt. Carmel is a private Catholic high school, located in an affluent neighborhood on the east side of Wichita. The student body during the 2005-2006 school year consisted of 879 students at the time the study began. Of the 879 students—179 of which are seniors—none were offered free lunch, and the socio-economic status of the students ranged from lower-middle to upper class. The ethnic and racial make-up of the student body was varied, but predominantly Caucasian.

With rigorous academic expectations, Kapaun Mt. Carmel has long been considered a college preparatory school, with different emphases in education, from “regular” curriculum, to the college preparation courses, to the Honors and Cum Laude Programs. Many of the students participating in this study were from the “regular” and college preparation population of the school, enrolled in English IV—British Literature. The sample included a total of 96 twelfth grade (senior) students between the ages of 17 and 19, both males and females, divided into two treatment groups; all students from the four classes consented to participating in this study. The study included 41 males and 54 females; of the students participating in this study, 88 were students who have attended school

at Kapaun Mt. Carmel Catholic High School (KMC) for the last four years of their education (see Table 1).

Table 1. Student Composition

	Enrollment in English IV	Enrollment at KMC for 4 yrs
Male	50	45
Female	45	42
Total in Study	95	87

Previously, during the 2003-2004 school year, Kapaun Mt. Carmel was designated as a State of Kansas Designated Building of Excellence, having received the Standard of Excellence in all areas of assessment—Social Studies, Reading, Writing, and Math. In 2004-2005, however, Kapaun Mt. Carmel juniors failed to meet the Standard of Excellence in Reading. Based on this negative change in scores, the selected sample was significant because they were the students who performed poorly in the previous year of Kansas State Assessment in Reading; of the 199 students assessed during the 2004-2005 school year, 95 were represented in this study (see Table 2). The students in these English classes have passed through the English curriculum at Kapaun Mt. Carmel—grades 9-11—and have adequately passed the requirements for this curriculum, with the exception of two students who were concurrently enrolled in English III—American Literature, making up incomplete credit.

Table 2. Student Performance on 2004 Kansas Reading Assessment

	Exemplary 100-93	Advanced 92-87	Proficient 86-80	Basic 79-68	Un- Satisfactory 67-0
Experimental Group	3	15	18	10	1
Percent E. Group	6%	34%	37%	20%	3%
Control Group	2	9	24	10	3
Percent C. Group	5%	19%	49%	20%	7%
Whole Group Total	5	24	42	20	4

For seniors at Kapaun Mt. Carmel Catholic High School, the emphasis in English is British literature, as well as writing. The skill levels of the students in these classes were heterogeneous, ranging from low to high-level students, as determined by both past test scores in English class and their performance on the Kansas State Reading Assessment for 2004-2005. For the students in this study, 17 were enrolled in a remedial English class during their freshman and/or sophomore years in school, but were mainstreamed during their junior and senior years; 78 were enrolled in “regular” English classes during their freshman through senior years (see Table 3), or for their entire enrollment at Kapaun. Of the students in this study, six were enrolled in Learning Strategies, a class intended to assist students with learning exceptionalities. Similarly, 22 of the students in this study had an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) on file for the school (see Table 3), for which the following accommodations were made: extended time on tests, copies of classroom notes, extended time on long-term

assignments. None of the students enrolled in the English IV classes involved in this study were on a 504 Plan for learning exceptionalities.

Table 3. Student Accommodations and Enrollment

	ILPs	Non-ILPs	Enrolled in Learning Strategies (2005-2006)	Remedial 9th-10th English	Regular English 9th-12th
Experimental Group					
Block 1	5	16	2	4	17
Block 3	7	19	1	4	22
Experimental Group Total	12	35	3	8	39
Control Group					
Block 5	4	16	1	4	16
Block 7	6	22	2	5	23
Control Group Total	10	38	3	9	39

For this study, the large group (all four classes) was divided into two groups: Experimental and Control. This categorization was based on the block scheduling used by Kapaun Mt. Carmel. The students in classes which met on A Days were assigned to the Experimental Group, whereas the students attending English IV on B Days were assigned to the Control Group. Though the classes themselves were heterogeneous, the groups were relatively homogenous, with the only noticeable difference being the size of the sample; the Control Group was slightly smaller than the Experimental Group (see Table 4)

Table 4. Experimental and Control Group Composition

	Gender Composition	Participant Total
Experimental Group		
Block 1	M—9 F—12	21
Block 3	M—13 F—13	26
Experimental Group Total	M—22 F—25	47
Control Group		
Block 5	M—13 F—7	20
Block 7	M—15 F—13	28
Control Group Total	M—19 F—29	48

Kapaun Mt. Carmel class periods were approximately 95 minutes long—a block schedule. Instruction days included four different class periods, with a 30 minute lunch during the third class of the day. Class periods alternated from day to day, every other day; in this way, students were taught in eight different subjects over the course of two days. Because of this schedule, the students involved in this study were exposed to literature circle instruction two or three days per week.

Instruments and Measures

For the purposes of this study, five instruments were used for measurement and analysis: the Reading Survey (see Appendix A), the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B), short answer essay questions derived from the

assigned readings, reflective essays, and the released 2004-2005 Kansas State Assessments in Reading.

Reading Survey

The Reading Survey (see Appendix A) was created by the researcher in order to determine the general mood in each of the classes regarding student performance, completion of assignments, motivation and comprehension in English class. The Reading Survey is an instrument intended to be analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches; it includes fifteen total questions. The questions range from an inquiry about students' favorite classes, as well as grades, to the number of books they have read for their own personal pleasure in recent months. Also, questions focus on what motivates students to begin and complete texts, as well as the kinds of texts they enjoy reading most. At the end of the survey, students were asked to gauge their performance in a typical English class using a likert scale.

Though some quantitative data can be assessed through this instrument, such as an increased number of readings completed by a student, increased comprehension, and involvement in discussion, this instrument was primarily intended as a qualitative means of measurement. The responses to the survey were based entirely on students' perceptions of their own reading, and did not reflect actual grades they received. Rather, this instrument was completed by the students based on their preferences and self reflection of their comprehension and motivation in a typical English class. Also, this instrument was used primarily as a qualitative tool because it is the intent of the researcher to get a general

“feel” of the classes—how they regard their comprehension and motivation. The completion of this survey and the final reflective essay, as well as their analysis was paramount in order to determine if students noted any changes in students’ perceptions of their comprehension and motivation to complete both assigned texts and personal readings.

The Reading Survey was distributed to students at the beginning of the study. Class participation points were given for the completion of the survey, and served as motivation to complete it. The validity of student responses were determined both by question two (their average grade in English classes) and question fifteen (their involvement in discussions and completion of assignments). Both of these questions were compared to their previous grades (both in past years’ English classes and their present English class). All of the surveys completed were used for analysis, and were considered a form of summative analysis.

Synthesis Rubric

As a means of both formative and summative analysis, the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used to determine student comprehension and participation in discussions regarding the assigned texts. The Synthesis Rubric was created by the researcher in order to determine a change in student preparation, response to others in the group discussion, individual input and a general growth in group discussion. Specifically, it was the intent of the researcher to determine a change in students’ higher level thinking skills with the Synthesis Rubric. Because discussion can be so difficult to assess, the

researcher intended that the rubric would help make assessment more objective. This objectivity was accomplished by using specific vocabulary used in Bloom's Taxonomy (1984) to rate the level of higher thinking skills, from memory recall to synthesis. The rubric was used as a means of formative assessment at the completion of discussions. Both the researcher and the students used the Synthesis Rubric in order to determine their change in discussion quality, individual input and response to others.

At the completion of the study, the Synthesis Rubric was used as a summative assessment; this was done through a comparison of the class's or group's change, as documented by graded rubrics. This instrument was used quantitatively in order to document a change in students' comprehension and higher level thinking skills, as noted by the students' various means of preparation, discussion and group growth. Likewise, this instrument measured student motivation, based on individual preparation and input.

Short Answer Essay Questions

The short answer essay questions were a means of formative assessment to determine students' comprehension of the assigned reading materials. These essay questions were based on the assigned reading, and were given to students after the completion of class discussions. The questions ranged in difficulty, from basic memory recall of plot to interpretation and analysis of the text. The questions were graded based on student response in the form of short essay. This instrument was also a quantitative tool, meant to measure student change in comprehension and higher level thinking skills.

Released Kansas State Reading Assessment

In order to determine change in student comprehension, as well as performance on state assessments, the released versions of the 2004-2005 Kansas State Reading Assessment were used in this study. These tests were created by the State of Kansas and released after the results of the 2004-2005 Reading Assessments were published. This tool was assumed to be a valid measurement. This assessment tool was meant to be a summative assessment and determined if students used the skills developed in literature circles and group discussion with fiction texts in the interpretation and analysis of non-fiction texts. The released tests vary in length, but were approximately three to five pages of non-fiction text, and comprised of 20 to 25 multiple mark questions at the conclusion of the text. The questions varied in difficulty from basic plot information to analysis and synthesis of the text. In order to determine a change in student comprehension, a quantitative analysis of correct responses on the test was used. The questions were broken down into categories of basic comprehension to higher level thinking skills, and student responses were used to determine change.

Reflective Essay

Finally, as a means of assessing students' responses to this study, a final reflective essay was administered. The purpose of this essay was to gather students' impressions after the study was completed, and was meant to be a summative assessment. It was the intention of this researcher that the essay would point to both the positive aspects of the study, as well as the negative

aspects from the perspective of the students. The reflective essay was completed by students in the Experimental Group only, as these students were the ones associated with the varied teaching method and group work.

Procedures

The course of this study took place over 16 class periods, or seven weeks, from January until late February 2006. Students in the Experimental Group were given instruction concerning literature circles, their roles, and their general purpose on the first day of the study. Instruction mirrored, in theme, the content covered in the Control Group. The content of the classes ranged from short, non-fiction essays to novels. The major variable between the two groups was the amount of content; the Experimental Group, in order to break students up into their literature circles, were given more content (with regards to quantity of materials available) so that each group could have a unique reading and discussion experience. The Control Group was given the same texts to read and discussed the text as a whole.

In order to test each of the hypotheses set forth by the researcher, assessment took place at varying stages of instruction, both during group discussions and after. The assessments were both formative and summative. Likewise, assessments were given upon the completion of each of the four major reading assignments, both non-fiction and fiction. The four major reading assignments included two short non-fiction texts (one expository and one persuasive) and two fiction texts (one short story and one novel). Instruction was conducted to test each of the hypotheses.

Design of Instruction for Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis is that: By choosing their own materials to read, students will be more motivated to complete assigned reading, as well as be more involved in discussions regarding the text.

Most directly, this hypothesis was tested based on student preference and performance, as demonstrated by the varying assessments between the Experimental and Control Groups. The instruments used to test each aspect of this hypothesis was the Reading Survey (see Appendix A), the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B), and the final reflective essay. Students in the Experimental Group had the option to select their texts; they were given a choice between 6-8 different texts for each of the major reading assignments. From their preferences (see Appendix C), groups were formed. In these groups, students read, discussed and analyzed the text. In order to determine their preferences, students listened to brief “book chats” about each of the options for their literature circles; this book chat was led by the researcher. After listening to the book chat, students completed a Book Preferences Inventory (see Appendix C). This inventory asked students to rank their top three book choices, rate their group skills and preferences, and to note any students in the class with whom they do not feel comfortable working. Conversely, students in the Control Group were given one text, chosen by the instructor, to read, discuss and analyze as a large group—the whole class.

Design of Instruction for Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis states: Students will be more likely to take ownership of discussions because they are involved in a smaller community of readers, and this improvement in the quality of discussion will allow students to begin making deeper connections to the text by using higher level thinking skills.

Throughout the course of this seven week study, students had the opportunity to discuss in groups, both large and small, the basic aspects of various texts. In order to facilitate the ownership of these discussions, students in the Control Group were given study guide questions to complete during reading. They were allowed to use these study guides during classroom discussion, and there was ample time allowed for them to generate and ask questions that they formulated on their own. At the beginning of the study, the instructor acted primarily as a discussion leader. However, as the study progressed, the instructor slowly decreased the amount of input given and questions asked to the group. Students had the opportunity to lead their class in the discussion in order to get at deeper meanings in the text. During some class sessions, students in the Control Group were allowed to discuss the text in small groups; however, these small groups should not be confused with the literature circles of the Experimental Group because the Control Group students did not have choice in the material or defined roles. After small groups conferred, the class as a whole continued the discussion.

For the Experimental Group, students were given roles in order to facilitate both their analysis of the text and their ownership of the discussion. These roles

rotated from class session to class session so that all students in the literature circle had an opportunity to perform all of the roles in the group. At the beginning of the study, students were given very thorough instruction of what each of the various roles entail. Likewise, they had these roles performed for them using the “fishbowl” method. This was done in order to guarantee that each member of the class (and literature circle) had a definite understanding of the expectations and requirements for each of the roles. A whole class discussion followed the fishbowl modeling session. Initially, the instructor assigned roles to the students for each literature circle discussion. Role sheets with precise role requirements were given to students to complete during their reading. Also, the role sheets included space for notes during the literature circle discussion. As the study progressed, the instructor allowed students within the literature circles to determine their own roles. Also, role sheets were phased out of the discussion protocol; however, they were made available to students who wished to use them. The purpose of phasing out the role sheets was to gauge the amount of ownership literature circles took as the study progressed. Ideally, instead of using role sheets to develop their discussion, they brought their own questions and opinions to the discussion.

Design of Instruction for Hypothesis Three

It is the third hypothesis of the researcher that: In their literature circles, students will use scaffolding skills to go beyond basic discussion of the text; they will be able to analyze and synthesize the text on a deeper level than those students not involved in a literature circle.

For the purpose of determining the efficacy of literature circles with regards to higher level thinking skills, it was the intention of the instructor to involve students in engaging and critical discussions of the text. For students in the Control Group, these discussions occurred during whole class sessions. The questions were primarily be generated by the instructor, and covered the basic comprehension of the text. For many of the readings, these questions came in the form of study guide questions and direct instruction. Students had these questions prior to the discussion, and were given access to them during class discussion. Also, the completion of these study guide questions was done on a voluntary basis; it was not required work. This was done not to give any one group an advantage in critical thinking, but rather it was done to ensure that all students in the class had a basic understanding of the text as a whole. As class time allowed, deeper questions were asked by the instructor. Likewise, students were given the opportunity to formulate and respond to their own questions in a large group setting. Students were graded for daily work based on their performance on a set of short answer essay questions (2-4 questions) given after the discussion.

Unlike the classroom composition of the Control Group, the Experimental Group was given specific role sheets to aid in the discussion process. From Discussion Director to Illustrator, students were required to look at different aspects of the texts by being assigned various roles. Based on these roles, groups discussed the deeper meanings of the text. Study guide questions were made available to the students, but were not a required homework assignment.

Students were encouraged to share the information that they gathered with regards to their specific role, and to take notes about others' discoveries, but their notes were not required work. Like the students in the Control Group, students answered a few (2-4) short answer essay questions to determine their ability to apply higher level thinking skills to the text, at the completion of the discussion.

Design of Instruction for Hypothesis Four

The fourth hypothesis focuses on students' abilities to apply skills learned in literature circles in both discussions of fiction and non-fiction texts. Hypothesis four states that: Students participating in literature circles will carry over the skills learned in comprehending fiction texts to non-fiction texts; therefore, student performance on State Assessments in Reading (released tests) will be improved from the previous year's performance.

This aspect of instruction occurred in the latter part of the study, after students established their understanding of literature circles and group discussions. As the study progressed, the texts changed from fiction to non-fiction. The non-fiction texts used in this study were both expository and persuasive. Though students were told to read, discuss and analyze the non-fiction texts, they were not informed that they should follow any specific guidelines or roles in the discussion of these texts. Again, students in the Experimental Group had a choice regarding which of the non-fiction texts that they wanted to read. Similarly, students in the Experimental Group were grouped based on preference of text, as indicated in writing. The Control Group was given

one non-fiction text to read, discuss, and analyze as an entire class. Study guide questions were made available to both groups, and role sheets were made available to the Experimental Group. At this point in the study, the instructor took a less active role in leading discussions and prompting students.

Method of Analysis

The analysis of the four hypotheses took place using several different instruments. The Reading Survey (see Appendix A) was used to analyze the first hypothesis regarding student motivation and assignment completion. In order to analyze both the second and the third hypotheses, the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used. To test the second hypothesis, the Synthesis Rubric was used to determine student ownership of group discussions, and for hypothesis three, the rubric was used to determine students' improvement in their higher level thinking skills. Also, in order to test and analyze the third hypothesis, students were given short answer essay questions to respond to after group discussions. These questions covered both basic comprehension as well as critical aspects of the text. Finally, the fourth hypothesis was tested using the release versions of the 2004-2005 Kansas State Reading Assessment. This hypothesis looks directly at students' abilities to map the skills learned in literature circles discussing fiction texts to discussions of non-fiction texts. Following is a more detailed account of how each of the instruments was used, and how it was applied to analyze the outcomes and hypotheses.

Method of Analysis for Hypothesis One

In order to test the first hypothesis, two instruments of measure were used. First, the Reading Survey (see Appendix A) was used in order to determine student motivation. Specifically, questions 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 directly refer to student motivation in assignment completion and group involvement. Based on students' responses to these questions, a qualitative analysis was made of the general consensus regarding: whether students have a pre-disposition to read for personal enjoyment (question 3); what motivates students to begin a text (questions 8 and 12); what motivates students to finish a text (question 6 and 9); and what steps students take after having completed a text (questions 10 and 11). The reading survey was given at the beginning of the study and the reflective essay was used at the completion of the study for the Experimental Group only. From these two instruments, an analysis was made based on the above categories.

Secondly, the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used to determine any change regarding student involvement in discussion of the texts. Not only did the Synthesis Rubric measure individual student involvement in group discussions, but it also measured the group's change in discussion quality. The tool was designed to measure any changes in who participates during the group's discussion. More specifically, the tool measured students' increasing or decreasing level of involvement in the group.

Several of the criteria listed on the rubric (Preparation, Response to Others and Group Synthesis) were essential to the analysis of this hypothesis.

Preparation (the first criterion) tested the above hypothesis by recording the students' level of involvement in the preparation and completion of the text. In order to reach a level of synthesis (Level 3 on the rubric), students had show that they were thoroughly engaged with the text: taking notes, developing questions, and formulating inferences. This directly tested the hypothesis because it could be assumed that a student who as more prepared would more likely be involved in the discussions of the text. Similarly, the second criterion (Response to Others) tested the hypothesis because it required students to do more than state their opinions and inferences about the text. The student had to respond to others' comments in a thoughtful and critical manner. Group Synthesis (the fourth criterion) also tested the hypothesis because it gauged the growth of the group's discussion. As students became more (or less) involved in the discussion, it could be determined if the implementation of literature circles in the classroom was an effective way of increasing student involvement in the discussion of various texts.

Finally, as a means of determining student motivation after the completion of the study, students in the Experimental Group wrote a brief reflective essay. Students were given a short prompt in order to focus their writing (see Appendix D) and their reflection. These prompts and thought questions included both aspects of novel selection and motivation to complete the reading, as well as students' impressions of their group and the group work which were assigned during the literature circle. The information gathered by this tool of assessment

was used qualitatively to determine student preferences, impressions, and shortcomings of the study from their perspective.

Method of Analysis for Hypothesis Two

For the analysis of the second hypothesis, one instrument was used: the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B). More specifically, the fourth criterion (Group Synthesis) was used to determine if groups began to take ownership of their discussions. The Group Synthesis criterion was meant to determine two things: 1) if discussions were adding to the individual student's understanding and synthesis of the text; and 2) if the discussions grew in quality, as determined by student preparation, response to others and individual input. It was this second aspect that was important in determining group ownership of the discussion. This was measured primarily by the way(s) in which each student's individual contribution built upon the group's collective understanding of the literary work. In other words, did the group begin to "feed off" of their own questions and inferences, as opposed to growing from the defined roles and study guide questions which were given to them?

Method of Analysis for Hypothesis Three

In order to test the third hypothesis and to analyze the impact of literature circles on higher level thinking skills, two instruments of measure were used. First, the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used to determine if students could use basic comprehension of the text in order to make deeper inferences from the text while in their group setting (either literature circles for the Experimental Group or whole class for the Control Group). Specifically, the third

criterion (Individual Input) was used to determine this aspect of analysis. In order for students to score at a level of synthesis for this criterion, they had to “develop, formulate, point out, differentiate, classify and categorize their ideas of the text,” as well as show a “solid understanding of the text and its relation to the world.” These are all dispositions and key phrases from Bloom’s Taxonomy in the highest level of critical thinking (Bloom, 1984).

The second method of analysis came from student performance on the short answer essays required at the completion of the reading assignment and discussion. The questions progressed in difficulty from basic comprehension questions regarding plot, characters and setting to more complex questions which required students to infer meaning and make broader connections to the text’s relation to themes or concepts. Responses to these questions, completed by both the Experimental and Control Groups, were primarily objective, making it easier to grade students’ abilities to respond critically to the texts.

Method of Analysis for Hypothesis Four

For the fourth hypothesis, the released versions of the Kansas State Assessment in Reading were used to analyze the efficacy of literature circles in aiding students on a state assessment. The released tests used in this study were based on non-fiction, persuasive texts, and the questions asked ranged from basic plot points and comprehension to more critical questions which asked students to analyze, synthesize and infer different meanings from the text. The test questions were multiple-mark questions only, and the analysis of the fourth hypothesis was based on student performance on these tests as compared to

the students' performance during the 2004-2005 school year. Just as their performance was divided into four categories last year—Unsatisfactory, Basic, Proficient, Advanced and Exemplary—so also was their performance categorized for the purposes of this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

For the purpose of this study, five means of data collection were used: the Reading Survey (see Appendix A), the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B), 2005 released versions of the Kansas State Reading Assessments, various short answer essay responses, and the final reflective essay (see Appendix D). Each of these tools was used in order to determine the efficacy of literature circles in a high school literature classroom with regards to reading comprehension, student motivation, and to conclude if literature circles cause a change in the quality of student response in discussions as well as short answer essays.

In this chapter, each hypothesis will be looked at in accordance to the various tools of measurement. The instruments used for data collection for the first hypothesis include the results of the Reading Survey (see Appendix A), the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B), and the reflective essay. For the second hypothesis regarding a change in the quality of students discussion, the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) will be used. The instruments used to measure changes in the “level” of student responses, or the third hypothesis, are the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) and the short answer responses given periodically after short readings. Two released versions of the Kansas State Assessment in Reading will be used to determine students’ abilities to transfer skills learned with fiction materials to non-fiction texts. A detailed description and analysis of the above tools and hypotheses follows this brief introduction.

Data Analysis—Student Motivation

Reading Survey Findings

The focus of this section is primarily the first hypothesis, which states: By choosing their own materials to read, students will be more motivated to complete assigned reading, as well as be more involved in discussions regarding the text. The following tables (see Tables 5-11) are representative of how students responded on the initial Reading Survey (see Appendix A) to questions relating to student motivation. Preceding the tables are brief discussions of the questions and prompts, as well as their relation to student motivation in reading.

The first question which directly relates to student motivation in English class is “Do you read for fun?” By this, the researcher meant to determine students’ pre-dispositions to read for personal enjoyment, and if they do this outside of class in their leisure time.

Table 5. Question 3: Do You Read For Fun?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Experimental Group	22	23	2
Control Group	22	23	3

The above table indicates that, for the initial question about whether students read for fun, the results were approximately equal. About half of the participants indicated that they read for fun, while the other half indicated that they do not. Next, students were asked what percentage of required reading they completed in previous English classes (implying grades 9-11). Students were

asked to self-report on this percentage, and their reports were not verified with previous English teachers. The amount of reading completed was broken in to ranges of approximately 25%.

Table 6. Question 6: Percentage of Required Reading Completed

	<10%	10-25%	25-50%	50-75%	>75%
Experimental Group	2	5	9	17	14
Control Group	0	4	9	17	16

The above table indicates the number of students who self-reported the amount of required reading that they completed. The Experimental Group tended to read slightly less than the Control Group. Questions eight and nine on the Reading Survey (see Appendix A) blatantly ask students to choose what motivates them to begin reading a text (Question 8), and what motivates them to finish a text (Question 9). For these questions, students were asked to choose only one means of motivation. As a means of clarification, in Question 8 “Recommendations” can denote any recommendations students may have heard regarding the text, from various sources. Likewise, “Other Media” refers to any print, video or various endorsements, advertisements or notices students may have seen or read about a text which motivated them to begin the text.

Table 7. Question 8: Motivation to Begin

	Recommendations	Length of Text	School Requirement	Difficulty of Text	Other Media
Experimental Group	27	7	8	1	4
Control Group	26	6	11	2	3

Table 7 indicates that many students from both the Experimental and Control Groups appreciated recommendations from peers as their primary means of motivation to begin reading. For Question 9, “Incentives” was not defined, and can denote any outside incentives for finishing a text given by parents, teachers, friends, et cetera. “Test/Paper Deadlines” is meant to refer to teacher-monitored reading activities meant to ensure that students are reading, and can include anything from completion of study guides, pop quizzes, tests and papers.

Table 8. Question 9: Motivation to Finish

	Lots of Free Time	Incentives	Friends Reading Text	Test/Paper Deadlines
Experimental Group	20	5	4	18
Control Group	18	6	4	20

The above table indicates that many students think both free time and test/paper deadlines are important means of motivation to finish a text. In order to determine if students are motivated to discuss texts with others upon the completion of a text, they were asked to rate this likelihood on a scale from Never to Always. When taking the Reading Survey (see Appendix A), students were not

given a distinction between Sometimes, It Depends, and Often; students rated themselves based on their own understanding of these terms and the frequency with which they discuss a text after they have finished it.

Table 9. Question 10: Do You Discuss Texts With Others?

	Never	Sometimes	It Depends	Often	Always
Experimental Group	9	17	13	6	2
Control Group	2	15	21	8	2

Table 9 indicates that the Control Group is more likely to discuss texts with others than the Experimental Group. Question 11 asked students to rate their motivation to begin a new text after having completed a text.

Table 10. Question 11: Motivation after Finishing a Text

	Unmotivated to Start Another	Indifferent	Motivated to Start Another
Experimental Group	4	28	15
Control Group	8	30	10

The above table shows that while more students from the Experimental Group are motivated to start another text after finishing a text, both the Experimental and Control Groups are relatively indifferent to beginning a new text. Students were given sixteen prompts when asked what would motivate them to read more in English class. They were given the opportunity to choose *up to* three of these motivators. For the purposes of this hypothesis, only the top

eight responses are tabulated because they were the ones students most frequently noted as a means to motivate them to read.

Table 11. Question 12: Motivation to Read More

	Shorter Texts	Fewer Texts	Choosing What to Read	Easier Texts	In-Class Discussion	In-Class Reading	Working Individually	Group Work
Experimental Group	22	14	19	13	13	13	7	9
Control Group	20	15	20	11	11	12	2	11

The above table indicates the various means of motivation that the students revealed on the Reading Survey. While these are only the top eight responses, few students had other motivations. Most students (from both the Experimental and Control Groups) marked that they felt shorter texts, as well as the opportunity to choose what they read were the primary motivations to read more.

Reflective Essay Findings

At the completion of the study, the Experimental Group was asked to complete a final, reflective essay. For this essay, the students were given the Reflective Essay Guidelines (see Appendix D). These guidelines offered students several prompts, including the following: What were some pros and cons of the study? Do you prefer literature circles as compared to the “standard” way of teaching (meaning teacher-centered, lecture style)? If your perceptions about reading and group work changed during the study, how so? Did you learn any strategies during the literature circles that you might use in the future or in other classes? Was the book too easy or too difficult? Was the book appropriate for

discussion? Students were asked to use these prompts as guidelines, and were told that they did not have to address all of the prompts in their reflection.

In these reflective essays, several recurring statements appeared concerning the ways in which literature circles were organized. Most predominantly, students said they learned from their literature circles because they felt more comfortable sharing their ideas in the small group settings. Several students reflected on the impact the smaller groups had concerning teacher support. When the entire class read a novel, the ratio of teacher to student support was 1:30, but in small groups, the ratio was dramatically changed to 1:6. However, many students noted that because the teacher was not directing the discussion, they felt as though they were possibly “missing” important information about symbols or underlying meanings in the texts. Some students noted that they would have liked more teacher input regarding their novel, but understood that it was difficult for the teacher to add to the discussion of several books at one time. Many students reflected that they enjoyed being able to choose their book, as opposed to having the book chosen by the teacher, but several noted that they would have liked to choose from more than six books; they thought that the six books chosen by the teacher were too few. Most students enjoyed being able to set their own pace for reading and completing their novels, but some said that they would rather have had the teacher determine their reading schedule, as is usually the case when reading whole-class novels.

Regarding group work there were varying opinions, though some trends were more prominent than others. Most students felt that the small groups allowed for easier, more “laid-back” discussions; they noted that they were more likely to participate because of the smaller group size. One student wrote that the group “provided a safety net”—a place to safely bounce ideas back and forth. Also, many of these same students noted that the small group size created “positive peer pressure” to complete reading assignments on time because they knew that they would be letting their group down if they had not completed the assignment. Conversely, however, some students mentioned that they preferred class discussion instead of literature circles because they dislike group work in general. Of those who mentioned their dislike of group work, their reason was primarily because they feel as though they get “stuck” doing all of the work when placed in a group setting. Because many of the students know each other well, there were only a few instances of groups not being able to work well together. The predominant comment regarding dysfunctional group work was that some groups had a difficult time staying on task.

Though some students noted how easy it was for their groups to get off topic, there were mixed reviews about the response logs and role sheets. While some students said that they used the role sheets as a guide for their discussion, many noted that they thought of the role sheets and response logs as “busy work”—something that they finished quickly before class but did not reference very often during their actual discussion. For the students who used the role sheets, they said that they were helpful in reminding their group about specific

passages in the texts. One student said that the role sheets made him understand that even novels can be used like textbooks; that is, he could keep notes in the margins and mark important passages, something he had never previously considered.

One of the final prompts on the Reflective Essay Guidelines (see Appendix D) asks students to think about how literature circles affected the way that they read. Of the students in the Experimental Group, approximately 80% noted that after having completed their novel in the literature circles that they would be willing to participate in other literature circles in the future; they also said they enjoyed gaining new perspectives from their peers. A few students reflected that they felt more likely to pick up an unfamiliar book and read it if given the opportunity to work in a small group to discuss the text. Other students said they thought literature circles made them enjoy reading more because they were able to freely choose their novel, set their own guidelines and rules, and discuss what they thought was most significant. Many students said that this group-driven study gave them a preview of how study might occur in a college setting—a place where teachers are less likely to require study guides and reading checks to keep students on task.

Synthesis Rubric Findings

After reviewing the Synthesis Rubric results from each of the literature circle discussions, the researcher discovered certain trends related to student preparation, involvement, and discussion quality. The Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was introduced to the students at the beginning of the study, and all

of the criteria and expectations were explained and discussed with the entire class. The rubric was used during the discussions when the literature circles met to discuss their novels, for a total of five different collection times. In addition to teacher comments collected and recorded on the Synthesis Rubric, the literature circles were asked to self-evaluate their group's discussions based on the criteria referenced on the rubric.

During the first literature circle meeting, there were two extremes regarding Response to Others and Individual Input: either the groups were eager to participate and there was disorganized chatter or students offered timid responses and were reluctant to participate in the group discussion. During this first meeting, many students scored in the Level 1 Category—Memory Recall. Students did not develop or add to each other's ideas, but rather quietly listened to their group members' responses and either sat silently waiting for their turns or merely agreed or disagreed. Very few opinions were shared or developed during the first meeting. According to Bloom's Taxonomy (as referenced on the Synthesis Rubric), students were content to "name, recite, list, describe or define" information; only few students attempted to explain, infer categorize or develop their ideas—as is required in the Level 2 and 3 categories of the rubric.

On the other hand, student preparation was more extensive during the first meeting than their response and input. Many students came to class with passages marked, their role sheets completed, and questions jotted down in the margins of their texts. Many students scored in the Level 2 category on the rubric because they were able to indicate their preparedness either by showing their

notes or completed role sheets to the researcher. Very few students came to the first literature circle discussion unprepared to discuss. As the study progressed, however, their preparedness began to wane. Instead of improving on or developing their note-taking and question generating, students began to lessen their preparation. This change from students being prepared to hurriedly jotting down ideas on their role sheets occurred most notably after the third literature circle discussion. Many students moved from high levels of preparation to the most general—often without detailed notes or questions. This negative change in documented preparation (i.e., notes, Post-Its, completed role sheets, response logs, etc.), however, did not necessarily affect students' input and response. Very few students were able to reach the Level 3—Synthesis category of the rubric because they were unable to show that they could connect specific examples from the text to larger, broader literary issues developed in the text.

As the study progressed, several groups began to refer to specific passages in the texts when responding to their group members' observations and opinions. They referred to different research also—research completed by their group members—or they referred to previous discussions, comments and predictions made by their peers. Because of this change in the content of their discussion—a shift from basic comprehension to application and synthesis—several individual students were able to improve their Response to Others and Individual Input.

Data Analysis—Response Quality

Synthesis Rubric Findings

For this section, two hypotheses will be looked at, the second hypothesis and the third. The second hypothesis states that: Students will be more likely to take ownership of discussions because they are involved in a smaller community of readers, and this improvement in the quality of discussion will allow students to begin making deeper connections to the text by using higher level thinking skills. For the analysis of this hypothesis, the fourth criterion—Group Synthesis—of the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used. This aspect of the rubric was used to determine group growth because it measured how the groups began to take ownership of their discussions, as well as how well students were able to build on each others' ideas (as opposed to merely stating individual opinions one at a time).

The fourth criterion (Group Synthesis), as well as the second hypothesis in general was the slowest to show significant change. In their discussions, students were comfortable stating their opinions, but rarely added to their peers' comments. For this reason, groups did not “grow” in the depth of their discussions. Although the Level 1—Memory Recall criteria for this aspect of the rubric states that “Individuals do not grow as a result of the conversation. The discussion did nothing to deepen the understanding of the text for individual members. Conversations, questions and general communication are stilted”, students' comments were not necessarily “stilted”. Instead of building on each

others' ideas, though, students often waited their turn to give their input and then, after participating, sat back as if their "job" in the discussion was complete.

At the beginning of the study especially, students had a difficult time determining their place in the group dynamic, and this likely had an influence on groups' abilities to move in the Group Synthesis category of the rubric. In fact, of the nine literature circles formed during this study, two of the groups never made it out of the Level 1—Memory Recall category, despite feedback from the researcher, as well as constructive comments on how to improve their discussion content and group interaction. Four of the groups moved into the Level 2—Comprehension category of Group Synthesis, meaning that their discussion, ownership and interaction improved, yet they failed to show that their "individual contributions built upon the group's collective understanding" of various aspects of the text, as outlined in the Level 3—Synthesis category of the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B).

For the three literature circles in the Experimental Group which made it to Level 3—Synthesis, this was only achieved at the end of the study, after several group meetings and discussions. The primary difference between the four groups in the Level 2—Comprehension category and the three in the Level 3—Synthesis category was the depth at which they responded to one another. For the students and groups who reached a level of synthesis during their discussions, they were referring to specific moments in the text, asking questions about the author's intent, and making reference to each others' connections to the text and the world. For example, one group discussing Salman Rushdie's *Ground Beneath*

Her Feet (a book relating to the myth and legend of rock 'n' roll and celebrities), made connections to modern celebrity worship and even brought in issues of current rock 'n' roll magazines to strengthen their discussion. After they made this connection, each member had similar background knowledge, and they used this starting-off point as a basis for deeper discussion. As a group, they went beyond plot-points and the chronology of the novel to discuss the ways in which they each interpreted the meaning of the novel.

Similarly, the third hypothesis deals with students' abilities to use higher level thinking skills, and states: In their literature circles, students will use scaffolding skills to go beyond basic discussion of the text; they will be able to analyze and synthesize the text on a deeper level than those students not involved in a literature circle. Again, the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used to analyze this hypothesis, and so also were the students' responses to the short answer essay questions after brief persuasive and expository readings.

For data collection regarding this hypothesis, the third criterion—Individual Input—on the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) was used. Most notably, the greatest change occurred from the first literature circle meeting to the second. At the first meeting, students timidly responded to one another, and often without textual references. Students did not go beyond general knowledge and comprehension plot points to develop their first discussion. However, the second literature circle meeting was different; during this literature circle discussion (and consequent discussions), students began to expand their own comments beyond plot points. Some students even used textual references to support their

opinions. This trend in improved Individual Input continued for future discussions for most groups; however, this was not the case for all groups. Some groups used their role sheets as a checklist of discussion topics instead of jumping off points for discussion. For this reason, students' individual input was often brief and basic. Students' individual input during discussion, however, was not the only means of measurement regarding this hypothesis.

Short Answer Essay Response Findings

Three non-fiction texts were used as a basis for the short answer questions during the course of this study. These texts were taken from the literature textbook used by the students in English IV, and neither the students in the Experimental Group nor the Control Group were allowed to choose these texts, although supplemental texts (collected from sources other than the textbook) were used for formative group work with the Experimental Group. This was done in order to maintain consistency in grading, as well as in preparation and practice for analysis and synthesis on the Kansas State Reading Assessment.

The non-fiction texts were both expository and persuasive texts. There was a substantial difference, however, between the Experimental Group's and the Control Group's means of discussing these texts; the Experimental Group discussed the three texts using role sheets, response logs, and small group (literature circle) discussions, whereas the Control Group discussed the texts as an entire class. For the purpose of comparison, students' scores on the short answer essays were categorized using the scale set by the Kansas Department

of Education on the 2004 Kansas State Reading Assessment; they were converted from raw points to a percentage scale. The texts used in this portion of the study included Text 1: Samuel Pepys’ “Diary of Samuel Pepys” (an expository text), Text 2: Jonathan Swift’s “Modest Proposal” (persuasive), and Text 3: James Boswell’s “Life of Samuel Johnson” (expository). The quizzes were objective, and included between two and four short answer essay.

Table 12. Performance Comparison on Short Answer Essay

	Exemplary 100-93	Advanced 92-87	Proficient 86-80	Basic 79-68	Un- Satisfactory 67-0
Text 1					
Experimental	16	7	5	11	8
Control	23	8	6	7	4
Text 2					
Experimental	14	21	9	2	1
Control	14	22	7	5	0
Text 3					
Experimental	4	7	13	21	2
Control	5	15	6	17	5

Data Analysis—Reading Comprehension

Finally, a discussion of the fourth hypothesis is developed in this section. The fourth hypothesis of this study states that: Students participating in literature circles will carry over the skills learned in comprehending fiction texts to non-fiction texts; therefore, student performance on State Assessments in Reading (released tests) will be improved from the previous year’s performance. Students in both the Experimental and Control Groups were given two versions of the State Assessment in Reading, and both versions covered the persuasive reading section of the assessment. Each assessment entailed a brief (2-3 page)

persuasive passage, followed by 50 multiple mark questions. After finishing the assessments, the scores were converted to a 100% scale in order to more closely correlate to the results posted on the 2004 Kansas State Reading Assessments. For ease in comparison, the KSDE scale was used for tabulation of students' results. The following are the categories into which students scores were converted, and are based on the 2004 Kansas Reading Assessment: Exemplary—100-93; Advanced—92-87; Proficient—86-80; Basic—79-68; Unsatisfactory—67 and below.

The student performance charts for the 2005 Kansas Reading Assessment (see Tables 13-16) are included so that comparisons between students' performances can be made more easily. It is important to point out, however, that the 2004 Kansas Reading Assessment included expository, persuasive, technical and narrative passages, whereas the 2005 Kansas Assessments used in this study included only persuasive texts. Scores on the 2005 Assessment have been converted to the Kansas Reading Assessment Scale by the researcher. It was in the interest of time that only one section (persuasive) of the Assessment was used in this study.

Table 13. “Atomic Bomb” KSDE Ranking Results and Data

Assessment Administered 1/20/2006, 1/23/2006

	Exemplary 100-93	Advanced 92-87	Proficient 86-80	Basic 79-68	Un- Satisfactory 67-0
Block 1	2	7	8	4	0
Block 3	5	9	9	3	0
Experimental Total	6	16	17	7	0
Percent of Experimental	13%	35%	37%	15%	0%
Block 5	1	11	5	3	0
Block 7	4	16	4	2	2
Control Total	5	27	9	5	2
Percent of Control	10%	56%	19%	10%	5%

After the first Baseline Assessment was conducted, students practiced various note-taking strategies in their groups, primarily Post-It notes and response logs; these strategies were used primarily in conjunction with fiction texts, either from their textbooks or with their literature circle novels. Students were given opportunities to practice these strategies, but were not required to use them on the assessments. After a month (approximately five weeks of class), students were given a second persuasive reading assessment from the Kansas Department of Education.

Table 14. "Whale Watch" KSDE Post-Test Data**Assessment Administered 2/23/2006, 2/28/2006**

	Exemplary 100-93	Advanced 92-87	Proficient 86-80	Basic 79-68	Un- Satisfactory 67-0
Block 1	2	6	10	3	0
Block 3	4	10	9	2	0
Experimental Total	6	16	19	5	0
Percent of Experimental	13%	35%	41%	11%	0%
Block 5	4	8	6	2	0
Block 7	8	12	4	2	2
Control Total	12	20	10	4	2
Percent of Control	25%	42%	21%	8%	5%

In order to more easily gauge the change in student performance on the assessments, their scores have been converted into a percentage change. This change documented occurred between the 2005 Baseline assessment to the Post-Test assessment.

Table 15. Percent Change From 2005 Baseline to Post-Test Data

	Exemplary 100-93	Advanced 92-87	Proficient 86-80	Basic 79-68	Un- Satisfactory 67-0
Percent Change E. Group	0	0	+4	-4	0
Percent Change C. Group	+15	-14	+2	-2	0

After observing the percent change between the 2005 Baseline and Post-Test assessments, the following table displays the percent change after a year of study, from the 2004 Kansas Reading Assessment to the 2005 Post-Test.

Table 16. Percent Change From 2004 Assessment to 2005 Post-Test

	Exemplary 100-93	Advanced 92-87	Proficient 86-80	Basic 79-68	Un- Satisfactory 67-0
Percent Change E. Group	6-13% +7	34-35% +1	37-41% +4	20-11% -9	3-0% -3
Percent Change C. Group	5-25% +20	19-42% +22	49-21% -28	20-8% -12	7-5% -2

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Implications of Findings

Implications of Hypothesis One—Student Motivation

The initial focus and first hypothesis of this research was to increase students' motivation to read and discuss texts. After the study was completed, it is the opinion of the researcher (as supported by the data collected in the Reading Survey and final reflective essay) that students involved in the Experimental Group had a positive response to the literature circles and are more motivated to read and discuss novels in groups than those students involved in the Control Group. This is supported by several findings: the results of the Reading Survey (see Appendix A); the responses collected on the final reflective essay; and, an unexpected finding, students' participation in several outside of school book club discussions offered at a local bookstore.

As indicated on the Reading Survey (see Appendix A, question three), there was nearly an even split of students interested in reading for fun. As the study progressed, students in the Experimental Group began talking to one another about their books, both within their literature circle and with students in other groups, as well as those students involved in the Control Group. When asked to respond to their change in motivation to read and discuss texts in their reflective essay, the results were varied (see Appendix G). However, several students wrote that they felt more inclined to read a novel after participating in literature circles than the 22 who initially reported reading for fun on the Reading

Survey. Similarly, their response to question six (regarding percent completion of required reading) changed from their initial response on the Reading Survey to their reflective essays. While a majority of students in the Experimental Group reported reading more than 50% of the required reading, several students noted in their essays that they felt more encouraged to complete the reading in small groups. One student wrote that the literature circles made her feel pressure to get the reading finished because she knew her fellow classmates in her literature circle depended on her to participate in the discussion; she knew she had to do her part.

Ultimately, the literature circles created a form of positive peer pressure for students to complete the required reading, and this finding is consistent with Daniels' findings (1994, 2002). This peer pressure was established in a few ways. First, the literature circles created their own rules (see Appendix E) and benchmarks for reading; they determined how much they had to read between discussions, and this helped motivate many to complete the reading. Second, because the students in the literature circles had to determine themes, symbols and significance on their own initially, they felt an added pressure to finish the reading so that they could participate in their literature circle's discussion. Many students wrote that because there were fewer people in their group, they felt motivated to complete the reading because they would not have enough to talk about if they had not finished the assigned number of pages. Finally, several students reflected that they enjoyed being "in charge" of their discussions, and

this helped them complete their reading; they knew the teacher would not be “feeding” them the information and they had to rely on each other.

It is also significant to note that (as indicated on question 8 of the Reading Survey) students in the Experimental Group already had a predisposition to discuss texts with each other. In fact, 27 indicated that they were motivated to begin reading books based on the recommendations of their peers; this represents 57% of the Experimental Group. By giving students an opportunity to discuss and make observations about a book they chose to read, the researcher used their predisposition to talk about and make recommendations as a means for motivating them to complete their reading. Students made their decisions to read the novels based on the recommendations and presentations given by the researcher, as well as their brief discussion with peers.

For question ten on the Reading Survey, most students indicated that they discussed texts with others only sometimes or depending on other reasons (not listed on the Reading Survey). In the literature circle setting, however, students were required to discuss various aspects of the text during class, and this (as one student noted) often went past the allotted time period; some students stayed after class to finish discussions or carried them over to other class periods. It is interesting to note that both classes in the Experimental Group wanted to know how their corresponding groups were responding to the text, and they shared a few observations, reading logs and role sheets with one another.

Similarly, in response to question 12 on the Reading Survey, students indicated that they preferred group work, choice and shorter texts as their

primary means of motivation to read more; all of these are aspects of literature circles and were noted in several students' reflective essays after the completion of the study. While students were given six novels to choose from for their literature circles, nearly all of the students wrote that they would have preferred a larger selection. Also, during the non-fiction and shorter selection discussions, students wrote that (for the purposes of in-class discussion), shorter texts were important so that everyone could finish the reading in order to discuss the text. For example, one group chose to read George Orwell's "Shooting and Elephant", and, because of its length, the group had very little time to discuss. However, just as Block (1999) points out, students appreciated the opportunity to select the text for their group. In general, the students noted in their reflective essays that they preferred the reading logs over the role sheets, but that they enjoyed open-ended discussion in their literature circles better than any worksheet. It was difficult, however, for students to stay on task in their discussions without these pre and post-reading worksheets.

As far as student change in motivation to participate in group discussions as indicated on the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B) is concerned, the Literature Response Logs offer perhaps one of the best indicators of this (see Appendix F). For their first response log, students in the Experimental Group were asked to choose and read a persuasive speech given by a notable English politician. The response logs used for this reading were filled out sparsely at best; students either did not take notes while reading or did not record their perceptions regarding the text very well. As such, their discussions were short,

stilted and their performance (as recorded on the Synthesis Rubric) was not very thorough. It should be noted, however, that this was their first group meeting, and students were most likely finding their role in the group.

After this discussion, however, the researcher gave students immediate feedback on their response logs; this feedback was in the form of probing questions and direct instruction, as suggested by Tovani (2004). The change from the first to the second response log was dramatic (see Appendix F). The second reading with response logs was an expository text by a British author, and students had the opportunity to make their selection from six different short texts. Not only did students make more thorough notes while reading, but they also made more predictions before reading, and noted several questions to ask their group during their literature circle discussion. The immediacy and thoroughness of the feedback had a substantial influence on the students' participation in the discussion and on their involvement with the text. This change in participation and individual input was noted on the Synthesis Rubric, as well as on their response logs.

While the majority of students indicated on the Reading Survey (see Appendix A, question 11) that they are indifferent to start another text after completing a novel, more responded that they were motivated to start a new book in their reflective essays at the completion of the study (see Appendix G). Some students were motivated to read a book chosen by a different group, or wanted to participate in an outside book club.

To this end, an unexpected finding occurred after the completion of the study, and it was a finding of significance regarding student motivation. A local bookstore in Wichita, Watermark Books and Café, regularly conducts several literature circles (or book clubs), and students were offered the opportunity to participate in these discussions for extra credit. Eleven students participated in one book club discussion only one week after the completion of the study. They read the novel, made notes, connected the book to their lives and then shared their ideas in a larger community of readers. Of the eleven who were involved with the book club discussion, nine of the students were from the Experimental Group, one was from the Control Group and one was a junior English student not involved in the study. During the discussion (at which the researcher was present and a participant), each student participated and interacted with members of the Watermark Book Club discussion.

After the completion of the book club discussion, the researcher asked students to respond to the following question: What motivated you to read the book and participate in the book club discussion? Of the nine enrolled in the Experimental Group, their responses included the following general themes: they felt more comfortable discussing books with other people because they knew what to expect in a book club discussion; they were interested in the book's title and what they had heard about the book from the researcher; they were not afraid to share their ideas with other people, having done so in class for the past several weeks; they wanted a book to read with their peers. Their feedback after the book club discussion was entirely positive, and many have signed up to

participate in other book clubs at the bookstore. In class, these students were enthusiastic and shared their opinions with other students—both their opinions about the novel (recommending it to several students) and their opinions about the book club. Not only have their opinions been well received in class, but many more students are planning to participate in the book clubs. In fact, the excitement has spread from the Experimental Group to the Control Group.

It is significant to note a few things regarding participation and motivation with the book club discussions here. First, the ten seniors who participated in the book club represent 10.5% of the entire study (both Experimental and Control Groups). Second, of those ten, nine were students in the Experimental Group, representing 19% of the Experimental Group, a significant number compared to the one student from the Control Group who participated in the book club discussion (only 2% of the Control Group). Finally, since the completion of the study, sixteen total students have participated in book club discussions offered at Watermark Books and Café, and more are planning to participate in future discussions.

Implications of Hypothesis Two—Group Ownership

While student motivation was noticeably affected with literature circles, students had a difficult time accepting their peers as valid “authorities” of the text. This is mostly because they are so used to having the teacher tell them the significance of specific situations, as well as themes and symbols in the text. The second hypothesis of this study deals directly with this finding, and states that those students involved with literature circles will take ownership of their groups’

discussion, as well as use higher level thinking skills during their discussions. It is likely that this is part of the reason that groups had a difficult time moving from Level 1—Memory Recall to Level 3—Synthesis on the Group Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B). For the literature circles who made it to the level of synthesis on the rubric, they were able to accept their peers' comments as valid assertions and observations, and it was for this reason that their group discussions truly improved individual understanding of the text.

This change might also have occurred because, as the literature circles progressed, enthusiasm for discussions started to wane, as indicated in several groups' negative change on the Synthesis Rubric in the Preparation criteria (see Appendix B). At the beginning of the study (and possibly because of the novelty of the instructional strategy), students came to class prepared with notes, thought questions and having completed their role sheets. As the study progressed, however, students were less likely to come with questions and notes prepared. They waited until the last minute to fill in their role sheets, and it was a perfunctory step that they had to complete, just as Daniels (2002) and Tovani (2004) caution. Despite their negative change in Preparation, several literature circles began referring directly to the text during their discussions, as well as making real-world connections to what they were reading. By doing this, some literature circles were able to improve the quality of their discussions (despite an apparent shift in preparation). Most likely, this change occurred because students no longer felt that completing notes and making observations were vital to the content of their discussions; instead, students were marking passages and

mentally noting what they wanted to discuss. In effect, they appropriated (or took ownership of) their group's discussion by making these mental notes.

While it is exciting to note that several groups were able to move from Level 1—Memory Recall to Level 3—Synthesis in the Group Synthesis criterion on the rubric, it was not the case for all groups. Most likely, this change did not occur because, although students were making more valid and thoughtful comments about the novel or text to be discussed, they were not adding to one another's comments and developing their group's understanding of the text beyond their individual ideas. Most literature circles (seven) were able to move from memory recall to comprehension or synthesis, and this is a noticeable shift because it means that 78% of the students involved in the Experimental Group were able to improve their ability to take ownership of the discussions in an attempt to use higher level thinking skills. This was apparent not only in their specific textual references, connections to real-world situations and observations, but also in their ability to build upon each others' ideas. Those three groups which reached Level 3—Synthesis were able to build on each others' ideas consistently and in various ways during their discussions, and by doing so, were using higher level thinking skills to create deeper meanings and connections to the text.

Implications of Hypothesis Three—Scaffolding Skills

The third hypothesis of this research states that literature circles will improve students' scaffolding skills, and their ability to more thoroughly discuss and understand the texts. Both the Synthesis Rubric and short answer responses

were used to gauge this aspect of the study. During the initial phase of this study, when students were being taught about literature circles and having literature circle discussions modeled for them, students were given the tools to improve the content of their discussions. Students were taught a note-taking strategy using Post-It Notes (similar to Tovani's (2004) method), and students discussed what constituted "higher level" discussions; they made note of various question words in their folders, and used these to enhance their discussion of novels and short texts. While most students were able to apply these skills easily to their novel discussions, they had a difficult time applying these skills to the shorter, non-fiction texts from the textbook (as was recorded with their short answer responses). However, there was a positive change in the level of their discussions, as indicated on the Individual Input criterion of the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix B).

During their novel discussions, students' individual input dramatically improved from the first discussion to the second, and continued to improve throughout the course of the study (with the exception of a few students, whose interest started to wane). Not only were they able to make broader observations about the text, but they also started to apply their knowledge gained from previous discussions. At the beginning of the literature circle discussions, students' comments revolved primarily around plot points, but as the study progressed, their comments were more in-depth. They focused their discussion on research they conducted regarding an aspect of the novel, or their perceptions of the author's meanings, or any real-world connections they were

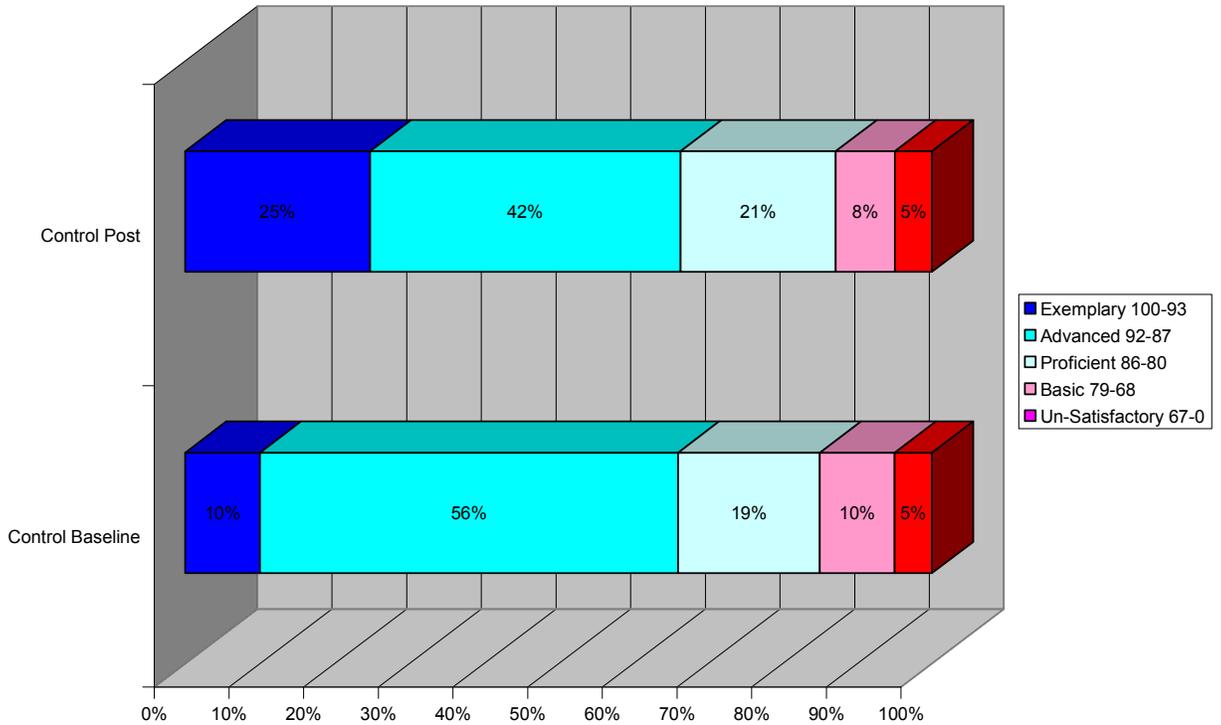
able to make with the book. Their discussion of the shorter texts from the textbook, however, did not improve as dramatically, and this is obvious as indicated by the results of the short answer responses (see Table 12).

There are three possible reasons for this difference between students' abilities to use scaffolding skills with novels and shorter texts. First, when discussing their novels, students have previous literature circle discussions to fall back on. They are able to draw on previous observations, notes and textual references to develop their discussion of the text. With the shorter expository and persuasive texts, it was a one-time discussion, and the students had varying background understanding of the selection. Second, students in the Experimental Group were given a choice in their literature circle novel selection, but were not given a wide selection for the shorter expository and persuasive texts from the textbook. It is possible that by taking away their ability to choose the text for this portion of the study dramatically affected their motivation to complete the discussions, as well as the short answer essays. Finally, it is possible that students who can express themselves well orally are not as able to express their ideas and understanding of a text in a written format. While their discussions improved during the course of this study, there is not substantial proof that students were able to use scaffolding skills to carry the knowledge gained during literature circle discussions of novels over to discussions about shorter expository and persuasive texts.

Implications of Hypothesis Four—State Assessments

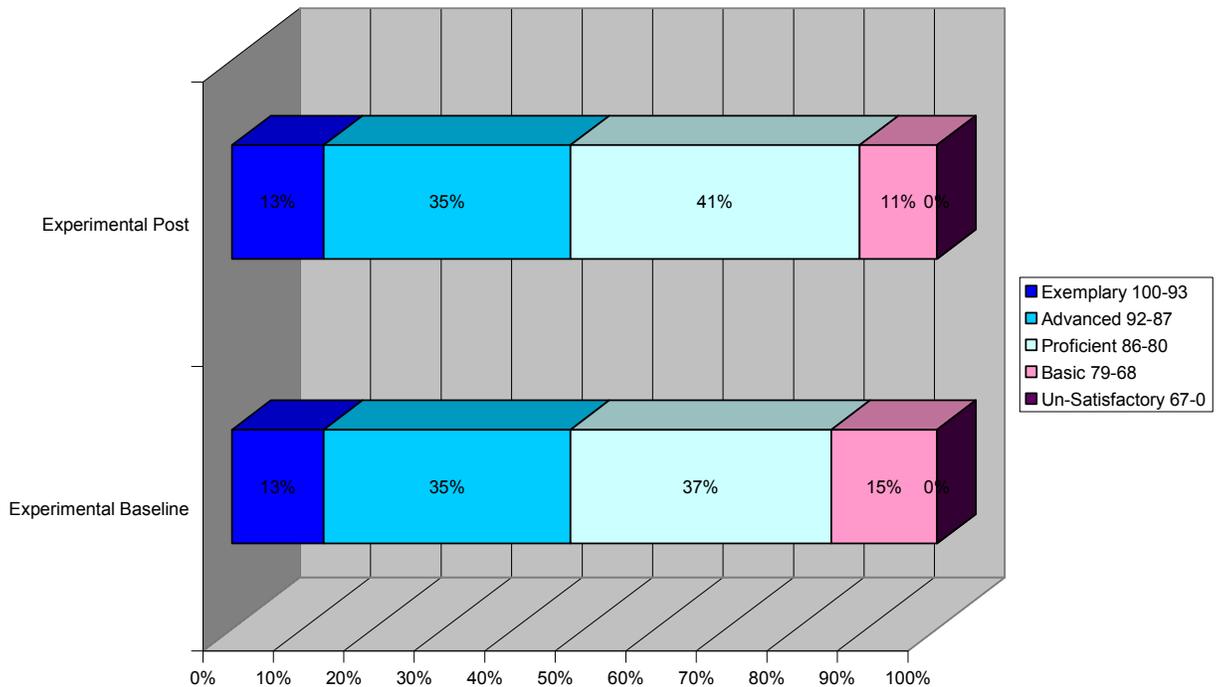
The fourth hypothesis deals not only with students' abilities to look at non-fiction texts, but also looks at their improvement on the Kansas State Reading Assessment. As the results indicate (see Tables 13-16), there were significant differences between the Experimental and Control Groups' responses. Although there was a greater change in the "upper-end" (Exemplary and Advanced) of the KSDE scale for the Control Group, a dramatic change occurred in the Experimental Group from the lower-level students (Unsatisfactory and Basic). What this could indicate is that the students involved in the Experimental Group were engaged in a deeper discussion of the text, enabling them to move from Unsatisfactory and Basic understanding of the text to Basic and Proficient. The support given to the students within their literature circles supported the lower level learners (see Figures 1-2).

Figure 1. Percent Change of Control Group on State Assessment



The above figure (Figure 1) shows a different perspective of Table 15, focusing solely on the Control Group. It is important to point out that, although the Exemplary category improved from the Baseline to the Post-Test assessment, there was not any change in the Basic and Un-Satisfactory categories using the traditional methods of instruction. This is change is different than the results of the Experimental Group (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent Change of Experimental Group on State Assessment



It is important to note that this figure (Figure 2) is also a pictorial representation of Table 15, which focuses solely on the percent change in the Experimental Group from the Baseline to the Post-Test assessment. In Figure 2, the most apparent change (and perhaps the most important change) is the change from the number of students in the Basic and Un-Satisfactory categories on the Baseline assessment to the number in the Post-Test Assessment. Clearly, the students in the Experimental Group had a larger percent change for the lower-level learners. It can be implied, then, that the literature circles served as an effective tool for students who typically have difficulties with standardized assessments.

Future Research and Limitations

During the course of the study, and upon completion of the study, it became apparent that there were some limitations. First, it would be beneficial in future studies if the course of the study could last over a longer period of time (perhaps an entire semester or even an entire academic year). Likewise, results may vary based on the size of the study. Because this study was conducted over the course of seven weeks, and with only 95 students, it would certainly be helpful for future studies to involve more students and for longer periods of time. The more time spent getting students acclimated to literature circles helps students become not only more comfortable with group work, but also with the teacher's expectations regarding higher level thinking during discussions. Scaffolding skills might be enhanced, as well, if the amount of time spent using the skills could be lengthened.

This study was conducted in a regular English classroom, so it might be intriguing to conduct a similar study with students in Advanced Placement classes, or even with students in remedial English programs. One advantage, however, of conducting this study in a regular setting was the range of students' learning styles, preferences, and skills; this variance allowed for an array of attitudes regarding group work, reading abilities and performance. Because the literature circles were formed based on student preference, all groups included students of varying capabilities. It was interesting to observe how students began to help one another in some cases, and (unfortunately) how some students were left behind during discussions because of the group's dynamic. However, the

results on the released versions of the Kansas Reading Assessment indicate that lower level students benefited from the small group, literature circle discussions.

One primary recommendation for future studies is that teachers spend more time modeling and scaffolding skills for students. Whether it be through the use of more “fish bowl” activities, direct instruction about the purpose and use of role sheets and response logs, or more in-depth whole-class discussions of what constitutes higher level thinking, it is vital that students have an understanding of the teacher’s expectations for literature circle discussions. Too often at the beginning of the study, students quickly went through their role sheets and, after their roles had been performed, their discussion halted. By spending more time giving formative assessment after discussions and modeling for students what was expected, discussions were enriched dramatically. In fact, the most dramatic changes in the quality of student discussion during this discussion occurred after the researcher gave precise feedback on the Synthesis Rubric (see Appendix A), and also on students’ Literature Response Logs and Post-It Notes (see Appendix E2). Often, the feedback was given by proposing probing questions, as opposed to quantitative scores for their discussions.

As many veteran literature circle teachers have noted (Chia-Hui, 2002; Daniels, 2002; Daniels et al., 2004; Lloyd, 2004; Noe et al., 1999), flexibility is key. Originally, the study should have lasted around six weeks, but, because of various scheduling conflicts and the necessity of discussion and modeling, the study lasted for an extra week. In truth, had the study lasted even longer, students’ responses might well have been improved—reaching even higher

levels of critical thinking. Not only should teachers be flexible regarding the time constraints when using literature circles, but they should also try to vary the methods by which they present note-taking and pre-discussion activities. During the course of this study, one of the methods proposed and modeled to students was the Post-It Note method of note-taking (Tovani, 2004). While some students readily attached themselves to this means of note-taking and thinking about the texts, others did not. It might be helpful to look into Double-Column note-taking procedures as well as student-generated graphic organizers. However, for any of these methods to have an effect on student learning and thought processes, it is also important for teachers to require students to practice these techniques repeatedly so that they become routine activities during reading.

Some students mentioned that they missed not getting the teacher's input when they broke up into their literature circles. One way to address this issue might be allotting specific time for groups to meet with the teacher, perhaps once a week. By doing this, students can gain their instructor's perspective and resolve any questions their group is unable to answer. This time might also be a valuable time for teachers to reinforce the group's ideas so that, in the future, students feel like they too can be authorities on a given text. Another way to address this shortcoming in the future might be for the literature circles to record questions that they have for the teacher to be turned in at the end of the discussion. The teacher could respond to these questions, give the students the feedback that they need, yet remain outside of their group. Too often when a teacher enters a literature circle discussion, students stop talking. By writing

responses to the groups, teachers can help resolve questions yet allow for the literature circles to come to final conclusions.

Final Notes

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this study is that it was conducted in a high school setting in order to determine the efficacy of literature circles with older students. Very few studies published in recent history (Baldikoski, 2002; Tovani, 2004; Ogle et al., 2002) focus on the effect of literature circles with secondary students. For this reason, the implications of this study are new and can be applied in the high school setting. Likewise, this study is unique because it looks at how students can bridge the knowledge gained during literature circle discussions of fictional texts to non-fiction texts. Most studies published recently look only at literature circles with regard to fictional materials (novels, short stories), and those are conducted primarily in elementary or middle school settings.

By conducting this study in a high school setting, students were given the opportunity to lead meaningful discussions about books and literature that they valued (partially because they had choice). The skills developed in this study are applicable to their future careers, both in college and in the work force, because the students were taught not only how to look at texts more deeply, but also because they worked in groups to master a skill or complete a task. Students learned the importance of preparation before group meetings, as well as the importance of thoughtfully considering their peers' comments. There is still a lot of research needed to determine the ways for students to best utilize the skills

they learn reading fictional texts with non-fiction texts. This is primarily because the texts that the majority of students will use after graduation will be non-fiction, and it is important that they know how to thoroughly analyze these texts beyond basic plot points and comprehension.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
Reading Survey

1. Favorite subject in school: _____
2. In previous English classes, what grades have you received?
 mostly As mostly Bs mostly Cs mostly Ds
3. Do you read for fun? Yes No
4. Number of books you've read for leisure in the last two months? _____
5. What kinds of reading do you enjoy? (Check all that apply.)
 Novels Non-fiction Magazines Newspapers Internet Text
 Graphic Novels Other: _____
6. In previous English classes, what percentage of the required outside reading did you complete?
 less than 10% 10-25% 25-50% 50-75% more than 75%
7. Do you prefer in-class reading or outside reading?
8. What motivates you to begin reading a text?
 Other peoples' recommendations length of the text school requirement difficulty of the text
 other media
9. What motivates you to finish a text?
 lots of free time incentives (games, prizes) friends reading text tests/paper deadlines
10. When you finish a text, do you talk about it with other people (not in class)?
 never sometimes it depends often always

OVER

11. How do you feel when you finish a text?

unmotivated to
start another

indifferent

motivated to
start another

12. What would motivate you to read more in English class? (**Check three.**)

Shorter texts

More in-class discussion

Fewer texts

More in-class reading time

More texts

Less in-class reading time

Easier texts

Choosing what you want to read

More difficult texts

More variance in class readings

Working individually

Everyone reading the same text

Working in groups

Groups reading different texts

More pictures

Audio books

13. When reading a text for a class, what helps you understand the text best?
(Check only one.)

study guides

class discussions

graphic organizers

teacher lecture

group work

more time to read by
yourself

14. In English, what percentage of the required reading do you comprehend?

less than 10%

10-25%

25-50%

50-75%

more
than 75%

15. Please rate the following based on your performance in English class.

SA=Strongly Agree A=Agree D=Disagree SD=Strongly Disagree

I understand the vocabulary in the texts we read. SA A D SD

I participate in all discussions. SA A D SD

I always complete assignments before class. SA A D SD

I enjoy talking with classmates about the text. SA A D SD

I pay attention in class. SA A D SD

I participate in small group discussions. SA A D SD

Appendix B

Levels of Synthesis in Reading Rubric

Discussion Topic: _____

	1—Memory Recall	2-Comprehension	3-Synthesis	Evaluation
Preparation	Student is a minimal participant. All information shared is general and not specific.	Student is an occasionally active participant. The participant's contributions indicate that the student is prepared for the discussion. His or her contributions include examples from the text, but do not show how ideas are connected.	The student is adequately prepared for the discussion. He or she has preempted specific discussion questions. His or her contributions connect more than one example into a larger conceptual category. In other words, the student shares specific examples in the context of larger broader literary issues the author used to develop the text.	
Response to Others	Student's responses to others are either in agreement or disagreement. No attempt to develop another student's ideas is made.	Student's responses to others add to the previous comment. If there is agreement or disagreement, it is mildly substantiated, but can still be developed.	Student's responses to others are thoroughly contemplated and developed. The student supports their response to others with not only specific details from the text, but also with deeper questions.	
Individual Input	Student uses memorized responses to name, recite, list, describe or define the topic. No information beyond general knowledge is given.	Student uses base knowledge to infer, explain, summarize, rewrite, illustrate or compare their ideas with the text.	Student uses comprehension of text to develop, formulate, point out, differentiate, classify and categorize their ideas of the text. It is obvious the student has a solid understanding of the text and its relation to the world.	

<p>Group Synthesis</p>	<p>Individuals do not grow as a result of the conversation. The discussion did nothing to deepen the understanding of the text for individual members. Conversations, questions and general communication is stilted.</p>		<p>Individuals in the group develop their discussion into something beyond basic recognition of plot. Each student's individual contribution builds upon the group's collective understanding of the literary work. The group reaches a deeper understanding of how the author develops the work. The discussion grows from the student's individually prepared comments and develops into a deeper level of understanding than the students would have otherwise reached on their own.</p>	
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Teacher Comments:

Appendix C

Book Preferences Inventory

Name _____ Date _____ Block _____

In order to determine the most effective grouping of students for the literature circles, it is important for me to know your preferences—not only with the book choices, but also with the nuts and bolts of groups.

Book Preference

Please rank your preference for literature circles based on which book you'd like to read for the unit.

1=most preferred, 2=next choice, 3=third choice

Next to your number one ranked choice, please write WHY you'd like to read it.

_____ **Ground Beneath Her Feet** by Salman Rashdie

_____ **The Peppered Moth** by Margaret Drabble

_____ **Time's Arrow** by Martin Amis

_____ **Magic Seeds** by V.S. Naipaul

_____ **Mendel's Dwarf** by Simon Mawer

_____ **The Namesake** by Jhumpa Lahiri

Group Skills and Preferences

Please rank the following based on your **comfort level**:

3=super comfortable, 2=moderately comfortable, 1=uncomfortable

_____ Speaking in front of others

_____ Talking about ways the reading is connected to your own life

_____ Talking about quotes from the reading you think are important

_____ Being told what you need to do—letting others assign your work

_____ Coming up with creative ideas and drawing

_____ Doing research based on what you're reading

_____ Finding out the meanings of words

_____ Organizing information and summarizing what's going on

_____ Keeping people on task

_____ Other: _____

Please note any other information or concerns that I should keep in mind when grouping you. All comments and concerns will be kept confidential. (Is there anyone you CAN'T work with?)

Appendix D

Reflective Essay Guidelines

Though you don't have to address every one of these prompts in your reflective essay, please use them as a guide for the focus of your essay. These should be typed and in MLA format, and should be approximately 2-3 pages long.

Things to think about when writing your reflective essay:

1. Remember back to when you chose your novel. Were you excited about starting the novel? Did that change as the literature circle progressed?
2. How did your group work together? Were there any glaring problems? What was your favorite aspect of the literature circle?
3. How did the literature circle "experience" compare to the "standard" way we talk about books—think back to *The Fifth Child* or *Grendel*? Was it better?
4. How did the literature circle schedule of reading compare with what you've done in the past? Was it easier for you to stay on track with the reading because you set the schedule, or do you prefer when the teacher gives you a set number of pages to read?
5. Think about the novel that you chose. Was it too easy? Too difficult? Why?
6. Has reading a book in a small group affected the way that you think about reading for school? Do you think you'll use any of the strategies we used in the literature circles for other classes?
7. What did you learn in the past eight weeks that could be helpful to you in the future?
8. Think about the pros and cons of working in small groups with your novel. Explain these in your essay.

Use the space provided to start drafting your essay. This sheet is due at the end of the hour, and you should have a decent amount written. I'll look over these drafts; your final TYPED essay is due on Wednesday, March 1st.

Appendix E
Students Samples of Group Rules

**GROUP RULES FOR
TIME'S ARROW**

- 1. Organize your job and finish reading BEFORE the discussion starts.**
- 2. Chairs should form a perfect triangle at the start of the discussion.**
- 3. Everyone MUST participate in the talk.**
- 4. The person with the gavel begins the discussion.**

GROUP RULES FOR MAGIC SEEDS

- 1. Always respect the person talking.**
- 2. Try to stay on topic during the discussion.**
- 3. Everyone MUST complete the reading BEFORE class.**
- 4. Bring at least a few questions or opinions to the discussion and TALK.**

GROUP RULES FOR THE NAMESAKE

1. Everyone **MUST** do the reading.
2. Everyone has to talk during the discussion.
3. Always have your novel with you.
4. Make sure you finish your role sheet.

GROUP RULES FOR GROUND BENEATH HER FEET

1. Everyone **MUST** do the reading. No matter what.
2. Write down questions as you read so that you can ask the group later.
3. Do your best to stay on topic at all times.
4. Know what your job is for the week and do it.
5. Try not to read ahead so that we can figure things out together.

GROUP RULES FOR TIME'S ARROW

1. Everyone **MUST** do the reading. No matter what. If you don't read, bring candy.
2. Second rule of reading group: Don't talk about the reading group.
3. Be able to discuss your role each time.
4. If someone is gone, another group member needs to catch them up later.

Appendix F

Student Samples Literature Response Logs

Literature Response Log

Name Date 1/11/06 Block 3
 Title Heroes Unifying A Nation Author Katrina Sullivan Pages 4, 156

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

What's it mean to think "you're British?" according to IRA?

IRA isn't the only paramilitary group

England only wants Ireland as a source of income

The IRA feels that N. Ireland people are really Irish, even though they think they are British

↙ comparable to other colonies?

Points for Discussion

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

Good notes, 😊

I'd like to ask them about:

I wonder why:

Are You Ready?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I finished the assigned reading. | <input type="checkbox"/> I completed my responses. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I marked the parts I wanted to share. | <input type="checkbox"/> I put my best effort into my work. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I've thought about what I want to bring to the group discussion. | |

Literature Response Log

Name Date 1/13/06 Block 3
Title Not Listening To Music Author E.M. Forster Pages 2

Predictions about the Text

We won't be listening to music
? STRANGE?

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

- he can't concentrate after the music starts - I don't understand what he is writing about	- music is 'gayer' - I got lost like two paragraphs in	- music that seems is better than music that reminds	- I didn't like this article
--	---	--	------------------------------

How? Why?

Why not?
You can **CERTAINLY** discuss this!

Points for Discussion

I'd like to **talk** to my group about the following:
Did you get lost part way into this?

I'd like to **ask** them about:

What **SPECIFIC** aspects don't you understand?

MUCH more thorough than this

Individual Response

1. What is the main idea/message/theme of the story—based on what your group discussed?
Music is different. Some see notes, some imagine; some don't care.

2. What did anyone do in the group that made the group work well?
Silence. Listening. > **GREAT!**

Were there any stumbling blocks in the group?

We didn't understand the point of the article.

Was there any behavior that messed up the group "flow"?
A constant barage of farting — nice word! — not so nice.

Literature Response Log

Name

Date 1/11/06

Block 3

Title Nelson Mandela's Release from Prison

Author Nelson Mandela

Pages _____

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

Why is this guy writing a speech about him being released from prison?

organs organised organisations (SPZ) This guy has "z" problems! apartheid?? ANC very powerful??

What happened in South Africa? inter alia? agree about negotiations!!

good research?

important vocab, huh?

You note important questions @ culture! good!

Points for Discussion ☺

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

I'd like to ask them about:

I wonder why:

Are You Ready?

___ I finished the assigned reading.

___ I completed my responses.

___ I marked the parts I wanted to share.

___ I put my best effort into my work.

___ I've thought about what I want to bring to the group discussion.

Literature Response Log

Name Date 1/13 Block 3
Title Three Screwtape Letters Author CS Lewis Pages

Predictions about the Text

Something about a "screwtape" will be revealed? → I was wrong! ☺

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

actual letters
jargon??
lots of philosophical
thinking +
perceptions

author thinks
"positively"
VERY persuasive
(pathos)
kinda plays w/
human minds
thinks = vulnerable

author very highly
knowledgable
God I know an enemy?
(I like how "enemy"
is capitalized just
like God is)

→ good point!

how does it end?

There's a novel, it's interesting. VERY good read!

Points for Discussion

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

what are their thoughts / points of confusion

I'd like to ask them about:

how is this relative? To what? Everyday life?

MAJOR movement at time

Individual Response

1. What is the main idea/message/theme of the story—based on what your group

corruption + falling away in the church

2. What did anyone do in the group that made the group work well?

begin conversation

Were there any stumbling blocks in the group?

confusion in the story

Was there any behavior that messed up the group "flow"?

we didn't have enough time to finish the article

→ I'll work on picking appropriate texts & timing. My bad.

Literature Response Log

Name

Date 1-11-06

Block 3

Title _____

Author _____

Pages _____

Please fill out all of the above info so I know what you're talking about.

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

makes you think of...?

insurrectionists

Sovereign State of Ireland

Return Ireland Freedom

*Military Force
"Terrorists"
Murders*

↳ constitutes what?

You've got some BIG ideas here, but how're they connected? 😊

Points for Discussion

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

I'd like to ask them about:

I wonder why:

Are You Ready?

___ I finished the assigned reading.

___ I completed my responses.

___ I marked the parts I wanted to share.

___ I put my best effort into my work.

___ I've thought about what I want to bring to the group discussion.

Literature Response Log

Name

Date 1-11-06

Block _____

Title PM's Press Conference / Lord Falconer of Thoroton

Author _____

Pages _____

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

what background info do you need?

What racial problems have occurred?

Asylum?

[Yellow sticky note]

terms: "proselytize it"; "scare mongering"
"proscription" → good to note unknown vocab! 😊

[Yellow sticky note]

Points for Discussion

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

I'd like to ask them about:

I wonder why:

Are You Ready?

___ I finished the assigned reading.

___ I completed my responses.

___ I marked the parts I wanted to share.

___ I put my best effort into my work.

___ I've thought about what I want to bring to the group discussion.

Literature Response Log

Name [] Date 1-13-06 Block 1
Title Shooting an Elephant Author George Orwell Pages -

Predictions about the Text

That it's not about shooting elephants at all, but conquering huge tasks or something. > nice look at metaphor!

Nice job pointing out major plot points.

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

Location:
Moulmein,
Lower Burma

What:
British Raj
elephant "must"

[Blank sticky note]

What about "deeper" questions?

terms
despotic - tyrannical > get dictionary next time.

Points for Discussion

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:
The terms, should he have shot the elephant?

I'd like to ask them about:
elephant "must"

More thorough than last time - NICE! :)

Individual Response

1. What is the main idea/message/theme of the story—based on what your group discussed?

How a group actually controls a leader -

2. What did anyone do in the group that made the group work well?

I asked questions & looked up terms - good!

Were there any stumbling blocks in the group?

not having much time to read then discuss

Was there any behavior that messed up the group "flow"?

no - class interruptions

I'll try to pick more "appropriate" texts. Oops.

Literature Response Log

Name

Date 1-11-06

Block 1

Title _____

Author _____

Pages _____

Fill in All of the above info please, so I know what you're discussing.

nice comparison :)

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

- I think England's response to terrorism didn't involve as much as emotion as America's did in the gov. *why not?*
- They increase their ~~defense~~ homeland security + defense the best they can
- It's hard to be a muslim out of Africa or Asia

Yep.

Points for Discussion

Nice RESPONSE to what you've read. :)

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

Any questions it made you consider?

I'd like to ask them about:

I wonder why:

Are You Ready?

I finished the assigned reading.

I completed my responses.

I marked the parts I wanted to share.

I put my best effort into my work.

I've thought about what I want to bring to the group discussion.

Literature Response Log

Name Date 1/13/06 Block 1

Title Shooting an Elephant Author George Orwell Pages _____

Predictions about the Text

~~The~~ This story will have a great build up and give a first person view of shooting an elephant

Journal Response

Use this space for Post-Its or to jot down ideas and questions.

- Story covering England's empire + the end of it
- Would he have shot the elephant if the crowd wasn't there
- would he have shot it if ~~it~~ it didn't kill the coolie
- they analyze peoples worth ~~through~~ through race +
- Didn't want to be where he was doing his job

I hope you use them to help w/ discussion.

Points for Discussion

Witty?

I'd like to talk to my group about the following:

If one thing would have been different would he have shot it?
 what do you think it would've taken?

I'd like to ask them about:

what's an elephant's "musk"

Individual Response

You point out some great ideas

1. What is the main idea/message/theme of the story—based on what your group discuss

2. What did anyone do in the group that made the group work well?

Were there any stumbling blocks in the group?

Was there any behavior that messed up the group "flow"?

Try to stay focused... even until the end of the discussion.
 ☺

Appendix G

Student Samples Reflective Essays

[Redacted]

Literature Circles

Ms. Walston

1 March 2006

Backwards Books

"*Time's Arrow* by Martin Amis is a story written in backwards sequence." I remember when you described how this book was written and I was really interested. So when I saw that it was the book I was going to read, I will admit it, I was actually excited to read it. As time moved on I still enjoyed reading the book. It helped a lot having the literature circles because I got different perspectives on the twists in the book. I think it would be a difficult book to read if you had to do it all by yourself. The *Time's Arrow* group worked well as a small group.

Jake, Chase and I worked really well together. Sometimes it was hard having a small group because we did not get a whole lot of feedback but we made the small group work. Jake had great insights to the book and his perception to the story helped me understand things I was confused about. Chase always had a little extra to through in the mix. He was quiet a lot but when we did ask questions they were fairly thought provoking. Together, with all of our different outlooks, it made this book so much easier and fun to read. It was a good mix of different students in our group.

I'm not sure if it was the literature circles or the book itself that made me want to read the book. I think it was a good mixture of both. Reading the book on your own and having what you think it means and then comparing with other people is a really good idea. It also helped that the book was interesting. I would much rather do something like

[]

the literature circles, than go back to how we did *Grendel* or *The Fifth Child*. After each meeting I somehow had a newer, better understanding of what I had just finished reading. Knowing what would happen after discussing the book, it drove me to keep reading. I loved hearing the comparisons and the contrasts that everyone brought. Seeing how other people viewed a part in the book was pretty cool.

The literature circle meetings worked out perfectly for the length of the book. We broke it up in thirty-three pages each time. It was the perfect number. Short enough so that when you had to re-read things you wouldn't feel bogged down by a huge reading load. Long enough so you could really get a good feel and grasp of the story. If the sections would have been any longer, I think it would have been fairly difficult. The novel was not easy to read. I found myself reading ahead but then having to go back several pages to remember what was going on. Once you got the flow of the book, like around the end, it seemed easier to read. I found myself not having to re-read backwards as much as when I first started it.

Having the literature circles changed my outlook on reading for school. I enjoyed this experience a lot. Even though it was a lot of work, with the worksheets and big projects, and some things seemed a little unnecessary, I did like. One thing I wish would have been different is that we would not have had to do those Literary Luminary worksheets. I thought those sheets seemed unnecessary and unbeneficial. I found myself doing them right before class so it was not any merit to the group. I don't think using those helped me any with my comprehension of the novel. I would have rather spend more time discussing the group's thoughts than looking over the worksheets. All in all, there was good and bad, but the good definitely outweighed the bad.

(+)

[Redacted]

Ms. Walston

English IV

28 February 2006

A Reflection on *Mendel's Dwarf*

When I chose my novel, I did not choose *Mendel's Dwarf*. I chose some other dumb book that was most likely written by an Indian (Gandhi not Sitting Bull), but I am so glad I ended up reading it. Out of all the books in class, our book was the only one that everyone in the group actually liked. I think that most of us even read the whole book!

I thought the literature circles were great. Instead of doing those stupid review worksheets, we got to discuss together what was going on in the book. I think that the weekly jobs were less than effective because by the end of the first literature circle, everyone in every group figured out that you did not have to do them before class. What I did think was effective was the check-sheet for how your group participated. I took that seriously every time our group met. Everyone in our group was pretty easygoing so we never argued or disagreed. My favorite part of literature circles was back when I thought they were all we were going to be doing all class, but then I found out we still had a full class load on top of reading our novels, which was weak.

I actually read this book which is less than I can say for any other book that you ever assigned. Sure I read the outside reading books because I got to pick what I liked but the *Scarlet Letter* or *Grendel*; you have got to be kidding.

Those books sucked. I think the main reason why I liked this new way of learning was that we had more of a chance to decide what we read.

I liked the schedule that we assigned for reading. It kept me going, along with many, many prescription and illegal drugs. I am only kidding. The circles would not work at all if nobody read, and so I figured that Leo and Daniel would not even buy the books and that left Alex, Megan and I to make up the circle. So at first, I was concerned with actually making the circle work but from what I can tell, everyone read.

I think we should do the small groups for all the books that we read. I liked it because I did not have to listen to you try and get motivated to gab about some lame book that was written in 1894 just because the administration and the English department will not let you change the book list. Maybe it is because you are too radical or maybe it is the fact that you are a big hippy. I do not know, but I think that we should keep doing the literature circles.

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

(+/-)

Ms. Walston

English IV

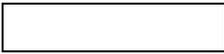
1 March 2006

Literature Circle

Ground Beneath Her Feet sounded like an exciting novel that would keep me guessing about what was going to happen next. It seemed to be a very different story compared to the things I have read before. I was very excited to start reading it. The whole reading in groups and discussing it seemed like a weird idea. I went into this project thinking this could be a very interesting experience.

The literature circle project we split the book up into stopping place for each meeting. After the second meeting, we realized no one was at the point where they were suppose to be. This is the point I realized this was going to be a long project. No one seemed to ever make it to the point where they were suppose to. It was a hard struggle just to read the book. There seemed to be a lot of just stuff in between the actually story. The book could have been cut in half and been a good page turning book. The plot in the story was absolutely excellent, it was a love story that could not even be classified as a love story. It was very difficult to push through the filler just to get to the story, I found myself skipping a few pages here and there.

Our group worked well together in general. No one in the group hated anyone or anything like that, which made things go smoothly among us. Several of us got along so well though, it caused problems we were often off topic which made it difficult for me since I have the personality where I just want to stay on topic and get everything done.



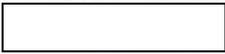
We did manage to have a few good conversations about the book though. We were able to bring up interesting points and quotes to each other. Whenever one of us did not understand the rest of us would explain. There were no real problems with discussing the book in the group.

!

In class, we all read the same book and have the same amount to read each night. This was awesome because we got to pick the book that interested us the most instead of having to read whatever was required. Unfortunately, the book I picked was not easy to read at all times, though towards the end the book became easier since so much was happening. I found it difficult to read the beginning of the book and I am not a person who needs motivation to read. When we read a book in class, we spend most of the time clearing up what really happened during what we were suppose to read for those who did not read. In literature circle, we were able to have more deep discussion and put more of our own opinion into the discussion. Where as in class only a few people are able to give their input on the reading. One thing that I think is missing from the literature circle's discussion is the teacher's opinion on the book, I really think that helps me to better understand what is actually going on.

) !!

Reading in literature groups has not really taught me anything nor had any great impact on me. Reading is still the same to me. I did really enjoy getting to have better discussions on what we read, as opposed to brief discussion and then a quiz. The literature circles were a good idea. It just needs some more work. Ideas for improvement would be things like get rid of some of the jobs such as the one where you draw a picture. Also, different books would be a good idea, ones that are all about the same length so not



all the groups are struggling. These groups really were a good idea and it really did help
me see more in the novel that I would of if I read it on my own.

!

(+/-)

Block 1

3/1/06

Lit Circle

I believe the Lit Circles were a good experience that could be improved but definitely used again. The best thing about the Lit Circles was that it forced everyone in the group to truly participate. You couldn't slack because everyone's involvement was crucial to fully understanding the book. The group members encouraged people to do their readings and their chosen tasks. We all had interesting perspectives into the book that other members may not have realized. Everyone in the group also gave their thoughts on how to improve the group. I still like class discussions but I think Lit Circles are a good thing to throw in every once in a while.

Organization is one of the things that could be improved upon on these Lit Circles. In our Lit Circle it was hard to get started sometimes because we weren't exactly sure what it was we were supposed to talk about or how we were supposed to do it? I think a little more instruction on how to conduct a lit circle would have helped. I think more frequent discussions would have been nice because we sometimes forgot what we talked about last class and the reading assignments would have been easier. One last thing that would help is if the class got to choose the five books so we might enjoy it a little more.

I enjoyed the book assigned to us but it was hard to completely understand because we had to read it so fast with it being so long and just with other homework we had to do. The book was too long for students during school with all their other homework.

I did like all the different plot twists in this book. It was never predictable and with so many different things happening it was hard to put down because there was never a good place to stop. The project at the end was a good idea because it helped us prepare for the test. I liked all the different ideas you gave us and I think our children's book worked out good. So after everything, I say good job Ms. Walston and do it again next year.

Block I - English IV

Ms. Walston

1 March 2006

Mendel's Dwarf - Reflection

Back in January two thousand and six when we were first assigned our books to read for our literature circles, I could say that I was ready to read this one because we were allowed to pick out our own book to read. As the literature circle groups met and days went by, myself and some of the others in my group began to not be so interested in the book because every other chapter it seemed like was about Lambert's ancestors, mainly Gregor Mendel. The ancestry chapters were getting old and repetitive, yes I agree that we needed to know about Mendel so that we could understand more of about what Ben was talking about in his research, but I don't think that we needed to know everything about him and his family.

I think that my group did in fact work together, and when one of us couldn't understand a point in the book, another was able to help explain what was happening. My favorite aspect of the literature circles was that when we met together once a week in class, we would discuss what was going on in the novel and if someone didn't understand something or missed something another person could tell them what they didn't catch or didn't understand.

The literature circles in a way were better and at the same time I think the "standard" way works better as well. I think that the literature circles were better because the ratio of people who didn't understand something was 1:4 vs. 1:30. I also think that the "standard" way works better because the teacher knows the book inside and out, and can explain in more detail what is going