

# Aligning the Circle: Strategies for Successful Literature Circles in the Secondary School Classroom

**Part I:** Describe lit circles: groups of 5-6 students in a class read and discuss different novels. The key components of effective lit. circles include response journals, literature circle discussions and culminating activities.

**Part II:** Acquiring Resources: One of the challenges of organizing literature circles is collecting novels. Undertaking literature circles requires English departments to analyze their needs in a different way. Possible sources of revenue include:

- 1) **Department budgets-** reallocate funds to allow for the growing of your lit circle resources
- 2) **School administration-** there is money in schools; present your idea as a way to improve achievement (be prepared to collect some data for proof)
- 3) **District Administration-** especially Director of Instruction/Achievement- again frame your proposal as a way to improve achievement (be prepared to collect some data for proof) This is especially true if you are an early adopter
- 4) **Your PAC-** if they won't give you money to books for classrooms, start a book club and request money to buy book club books. After the club finishes a book you can transfer the book to your lit. circle inventory

**Part III-** Structuring lit. circles in the classroom: Secondary schools are saddled with unique scheduling challenges. Elementary classrooms have much more flexibility in when and how often lit. circles are held. Secondary teachers must consider a number of factors: 1) Are you linear or semester or something else? 2) What is your classroom management style? 3) How much time do you want to dedicate to the lit. circle discussions 4) How many novels do you want your students to read?

- If you spend 4 weeks (semester) in one lit. circle group, we recommend one discussion per week for each group. If you are a 'hands on' classroom manager you will probably want to sit in on each discussion. This will require you to have an activity for the rest of the class to do while you are in a group. If you are a 'hands off' classroom manager you may decide to let the discussions happen at the same time and circulate the room. Age of students will be a factor. As well, you may change your approach after becoming more comfortable with the process.
- If you are linear you may decide to schedule lit circles over 6 weeks. This may not look like one per week, but one every 10 days or so. Again, whatever works for you.