

Teaching and Assessing Inferencing as Part of Literature Circles

Julie Krall, SD #54 – My work in this area has been influenced by Faye Brownlie, Caren Cameron, Judy Halbert, Linda Kaser and Judith Langer.

- Introduce Literature Circles using the approach from “Grand Conversations, Thoughtful Responses” by Faye Brownlie.

Teaching Inferencing

- Familiar images such as birthday parties or leaves changing colours are used to allow students to practice making inferences. Show the images, and with a partner have the students determine what is happening in the pictures. When students answer with the obvious, they are asked, “how did you know or figure out what is happening?” The students will begin to realize that they have used personal experiences to draw conclusions from the text.
- Introduce the meaning of inferencing.
- Give some sample sentences to students to practice making inferences.
 - Mike practices his trumpet for 3 hours each day.
 - The boat drifted out at sea.
 - The starting goalie had a broken thumb.
 - Tomorrow we will clean out our desks and take everything home.
- Explain to students that as part of their discussions and journals they will be making inferences about characters in the novels being read.

Response Journals

Before

- Have students participate in setting clear expectations for their learning. You may wish to have students create a title page that shows the definition and examples of inferencing, and 1 or 2 clearly stated objectives for their learning. An example from one student’s Response Journal title page was “I must use evidence and examples from the novel to make inferences about the characters.”

During

- Although many other topics and ideas will be written about during literature circles, the students are always asked to share their inferences and the evidence that helped them to draw their conclusions.
- Include making inferences and showing the evidence into the journal format you choose to use.
- Include making inferencing as part of the process when creating journal criteria with your students. The following list of criteria for journals was created together with my grade 8 classes. As a group, we decided that the criteria should only show the highest standard that students were aiming to achieve. Initially, I would highlight the parts the student had done well, and then over time introduced the step of having the students highlight the things that they thought they had done well. I was able to circulate to each student, and with my highlighter, give them my feedback on their entries. Any parts not highlighted were addressed immediately.

Criteria for Response Journals	Specifics/Details
<i>Follow all parts of the double-entry format.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Event and explanation • Challenging vocabulary word and explanation • Inference, quote and explanation • Title, author
<i>Follow the rules for grammar, spelling and punctuation.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct spelling • Good grammar • Correct use of punctuation
<i>Show that you can use evidence from the text to support your statements.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use evidence to help explain your understanding of making inferences.

After

- Students were given the option of redoing their journal entries, or incorporating their learning into their next journal. The criteria list was dated and kept as a record. At the end of literature circles, students were asked to choose their best 3 journals to be marked.

Discussion Groups

Before

- The students need to be prepared for the discussion. As a class, we created criteria that will guide students in understanding what is expected during the discussions. My classes helped to create the following criteria:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listened to others' comments. • Responded to questions and comments. • Shared ideas and personal connections. • Provided an inference I made about a character. Explained what made me believe it to be true.
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- Teachers should consider how they will model questions and statements as part of the discussion. Some of the questions I have developed are: What part of the story was most powerful? Why? How might the characters have dealt with the situation differently? Describe how something in your life relates to this story. How might you have dealt with the situation in the story? I also come prepared to model a few examples of inferences I made about characters in the novels, and the evidence I used to support the inferences.

During

- As part of the natural discussion about the novel, students are also asked to provide their examples of inferences and the evidence they have to support them.

After

- Students use the Discussion Criteria to reflect on their own participation. The teacher takes a moment to assess each student based on the criteria, and provides the students with the feedback. Students are asked to complete the 2 stars and a wish (2 strengths, 1 thing to work on) on the same page, and make a plan of how they would like to improve their “wish” for the next discussion.