

Reading Circles - Kentucky Style

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Reading Circles - Kentucky Style

A practical means of bringing together independent reading and cooperative learning that ensures

- Each reader brings to a discussion experiences and contributions that help to decipher the meaning of the reading
- The reading process is active, i.e., it involves asking questions, noticing patterns, predicting, inferring, making notes, summarizing, etc.
- Readers become teachers/learners simultaneously
- Everyone's opinion is valued and a common understanding is not a goal
- Small groups are given shared leadership and responsibilities through separate but equal reading roles
- Each reader understands his or her role is very important and the success of the group is dependent upon him or her

An effective strategy based on Harvey Daniels' Literature Circles whose definition is as follows:

Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups who have chosen to read the same story, poem, article or book. While reading each group-determined portion of the text (either in or outside of class), each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion and everyone comes to the group with the notes needed to help perform that job. The circles have regular meetings, with discussion roles rotating each session. When they finish a book, the circle members plan a way to share highlights of their reading with the wider community; then they trade members with other finishing groups, select more reading, and move into a new cycle. Once readers can successfully conduct their own wide-ranging, self-sustaining discussions, formal discussion roles may be dropped.

Reading Circles - Kentucky Style

- An adaptation of a proven reading strategy that meets Kentucky's standards and actively engages every student - including the non-reader
- Involves pre-reading by instructor/leader to determine appropriate reading roles that will help decipher the specific content
- Applies to literary, informational, persuasive, and practical workplace texts

Examples of roles that should be "tailor made" to suit the reading are:

Literary reading

Connector
Discussion Director
Illustrator
Language Builder

Literary Critic
Literary Luminary
Summarizer
Word Wizard

Informational reading

Graphic Organizer
Fact Finder

Summarizer
Connector

Persuasive reading

Activist
Pragmatist

Advocate
Protester

Practical workplace

Informant
Investigator

Word Smith
Practitioner

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Background Information

This packet of information is an adaptation of Harvey Daniels' *Literature Circles* designed to meet Kentucky's middle school reading standards.

Thus, each of the reading roles for literary reading exemplified in this packet has been aligned with Core Content for Reading. (The Core Content is identified on each role sheet for the benefit of the students as well as the teacher).

For the purpose of introducing the concept of Reading Circles to middle school students, a chapter from Gray Paulsen's *Dogsong* has been used as a "mentor text" from which sample student responses have been developed.

However, teachers are encouraged to use their own "mentor texts" and their own students' work as exemplary models.

Graphic organizers have been developed for some of the roles to demonstrate that students can be allowed choice in the manner in which they respond.

Finally, to reinforce the reading/writing connection, the role sheets can be used as a basis for mini lessons not only to evaluate published text but also to apply lessons learned to students' writing.

"The young men with whom we worked sought relationships. But, unfortunately, some of them never found relationships through reading, and few of them engaged in relationships with authors, the intelligences that create and communicate through text. We think that with the right instruction they could be helped in doing so." (Michael W. Smith, Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, *Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*)

Reading Circle Caveat

*“The goal of all role sheets is to make role sheets obsolete”
(Harvey Daniels, 1994)*

Initially, the role sheets (each printed on a different colored paper) help students focus on their purpose for reading and gather salient information for discussion. However, as students build their skills in responding to what they read, the gradual elimination of this scaffolding is recommended.

Regular Reading Journal responses to relevant teacher created prompts are also recommended as an integral part of the Reading Circle experience. Ultimately, these journal responses or other forms of notes could take the place of role sheets and provide the student with a foundation for discussion.

*“Text is just ink on a page until a reader comes along and gives it life”
(Louise Rosenblatt)*

What Makes a Good Discussion?

- **Empathetic Listening:** Give your complete attention to the speakers, showing the students in your group that you value their contributions.

Use positive body language
Make eye contact

- **Responding to Group Members:** Expand on other group members' ideas by sharing your thoughts and feelings about what they contributed to the conversations.

- **Clarifying:** Ask questions to understand each other's ideas better.

Tell me more about. . .
What do you mean. . .?
Why do you think. . .?

- **Sharing ideas and justifying opinions:** Share parts of the book that demonstrate the core content that you are addressing and explain why they are important. Justify your opinions.

I think . . . is a good example of a metaphor because. . .

I wonder if the relationship between these two characters would have changed if they had . . .

I was surprised that the plot changed course because I was expecting . . .

This part reminds me of . . . because . . .

I don't understand why the author keeps on repeating this word . . .

I like this section of writing because . . .

I noticed. . . because . . .

I wish . . . because . . .

I think this story is really about . . . because . . .

- **Self-reflection:** Consider what has been done well, and make decisions about what needs to be improved. Set goals for the future.

Reading Circle Rubric

Name: _____

Date: _____

Book title/reading passage: _____

Expert Participant

- Brings reading material with passages clearly identified
- Brings thoughtful written comments
- Contributes significantly to discussion
- Keeps the discussion going
- Listens and responds thoughtfully
- Builds on others' comments
- Makes insightful connections to other readings and/or experiences
- Discusses author's style/literary elements, when appropriate

Willing Learner

- Brings reading material
- Understands purpose of reading circle
- Brings some written notes
- Contributes to discussions occasionally or when prompted
- Sometimes listens and responds appropriately
- Occasionally asks questions
- Shares ideas when asked

Active Participant

- Brings reading material with passages identified
- Brings written comments
- Contributes appropriately to discussions
- Listens actively and responds adequately
- Makes connections to other readings and/or experiences
- Discusses author's style/literary elements (when appropriate)

Reluctant Reader

- Not prepared for discussion
- Forgets written comments or reading material
- Conversation off-task
- Seldom listens
- Rarely responds to group
- Reluctant to ask relevant questions
- Unwilling to share ideas

Rubric for Reading Circle Journals

Name: _____ Date: _____

Book/passage title: _____

Beginner

- Response shows a minimal understanding of the response prompt
- Response uses no information from the text as support
- Errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization that interfere with communication

Learner

- Response shows a basic understanding of the response prompt
- Response uses limited information from the text as support
- Some errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization that do not interfere with communication

Skillful

- Response shows an understanding of the response prompt
- Response uses information from the text as support
- Few errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

Expert

- Response shows an in-depth understanding of the response prompt
- Response is well developed and includes information from the text as support
- Control of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

A Note for the Teacher. . .

The excerpt that follows from *Dogsong* by Gary Paulson is a suitable mentor text to introduce reading circles because it:

- ❑ engages all students
- ❑ appeals to boys*
- ❑ contains several literary elements
- ❑ introduces many discussion topics

The sample student responses to *Dogsong* are designed to model for students (via an overhead) what an acceptable response looks like. However, it is important that students understand that their responses are likely to be different because a common understanding of a text is NOT a goal, but it is a goal that each reader develops a personal response so that he/she can bring to a discussion his/her own experiences and contributions.

Please note also that the *Comic Sans* font was deliberately chosen as a “friendly font” for the student responses in an effort to assuage the resistance to black ink that so many students express. Regardless, through this electronic version, the font can be changed to meet the needs of both teacher and student.

After using *Dogsong*, teachers are encouraged to use their own mentor texts and to create their own sample student responses

*“Boys tend to resist reading stories about girls, whereas girls do not tend to resist reading stories about boys” [*Reading Don't Fix No Chevys*, p.11, Smith & Wilhelm]

Dogsong Chapter 5

Shamans had great power in the old times before church came. They could make stones talk, and the snow, and I knew one once that had two heads that talked to each other. They fought all the time, those two heads, and finally it was said that one of the heads told the body to kill the other. This it did and of course that made the whole body die. Shamans had great power but they weren't always smart.

An old woman's memory

Russel had moved away from life in the village but he was not rebelling. He was working toward something in his mind, not away from something he didn't like. He had moved in with Oogruk, but his father knew it and approved.

There was school, of course. He was not going to school but he was learning and everybody knew that; it would have been hard to stop him trying to learn what he wanted and needed to know and so nobody tried. It would not have been polite to try it and many considered Russel old enough to know what he was doing.

Life in the village went on as it had before. Men took snowmachines out on the ice to find seals, when they could get through the leads. Other hunters took other snowmachines back into the hills and found caribou, sometimes killing six or seven to bring back for other people who could not hunt.

In the long darkness house life took on a meaning that couldn't exist in the summer. Families sometimes moved in with each other for a time, played games, fought the boredom that could come with the semi-arctic night. The village had a game room with television and it was usually crowded with both adults and children, watching the outside world.

All but Russel.

And Oogruk.

Russel hunted caribou twice more but didn't get any meat either time. He saw them at a distance, but couldn't get the sled close enough to make a stalk and a kill. On the second attempt he set the hook, left the dogs, and with the bow worked up some small creek beds but the deer saw him before he could get close enough for a shot. He took rabbits and ptarmigan home each time, using a small net Oogruk had fashioned and showed him how to use. With the net, laying it on the ground and using a long line, he lured the birds with a handful of berries. When they were on the net he flicked it closed with a jerk of his wrist and caught five and six birds at a time.

So he made meat. Light meat. That's what Oogruk called it. And it was good meat, as far as it went. The small birds tasted sweet and were tender and soft, which suited Oogruk's poor teeth.

But the dogs needed heavy meat, heavy red meat and fat or they could not work, could not run long and hard.

And heavy meat meant deer. Caribou.

Or seal.

So it came on a cold clear morning that Russel decided to go out for seal again. It was still dark when he awakened and sat up on the floor but before he could get his pants on Oogruk was sitting up and had lighted the lamp.

“It is time for me to go out for seals again. For food for the dogs. I will go out on the ice.”

Oogruk nodded. “Yes. Yes. I know that. But this time I will go with you.”

Russel stopped, his bearskin pants halfway up. He looked at the old man. “To hunt seals?”

“That. And other things. There are certain things that must be done at this time and it is for an old man to do them when the time is right.”

Russel waited but Oogruk said nothing further. Instead he stood, slightly stiff, and feeling with his hands found clothes on the side wall. He dressed in pants and mukluks and another squirrelskin underparka. Then he took down an older outerparka, of deerskin, one with holes and worn places, and shrugged it on over his head.

“I have a good parka,” Russel said. “Let me give it to you.”

Oogruk shook his head. “Not this time. You keep it. You will need it and I won’t. Go now and harness the dogs.”

Russel finished dressing and went out for the team. They knew him now, knew him well, and greeted him with tails and barks when they saw him take the harness off the pegs. He laid the gangline out onto the snow and harnessed the team quickly, wondering why the old man wanted to go.

When the dogs were harnessed he took the weapons – two harpoons and one killing lance with a plain sharpened point – and tied them into the sled. When he turned back to the house, Oogruk had come out of the door and was looking across the ice.

His milk-white eyes stared across the ice. But he was seeing nothing. Or, Russel thought, maybe he was seeing everything.

“I smell the sea out there,” Oogruk said.

“It is not too far today. The ice lets the smell come across.”

“The dogs are harnessed.”

“I know.”

“Would you drive them?”

“No. I will ride. Put me in the sled and you drive.”

Russel took his hand and put him in the sled, settling him back against the crosspieces at the back. When Oogruk was settled Russel pulled the hook and called the dogs up.

They tore away from the buildings and out across the ice. When he was away on the ice and the fire was burned out of them a bit he dragged the brake down and slowed them and looked back at the village.

Small gray buildings and caches on the dirty snow of the beach, with people here and there. Someone he did not recognize waved at him and he waved back. Dirty smoke came from chimneys and slid off with the wind and he watched as they moved away, picked up speed on the clean icesnow, until he rounded the point heading north and the buildings were gone.

He waited for some kind of sadness to come but it did not, did not, and he turned back to the sled and the dogs lined out in front and he moved them over to the right a little, using a soft “Gee,” to let them know it was a gentle turn. The sea was a blue line on the horizon when they crossed the high points and could see ahead.

Oogruk said nothing, but when they got within a couple of miles of the sea and the spray smell was heavy in the cold air he held up his mittened hand to signal a halt.

“There will be seals. Watch for seals.” His voice was excited, hushed but alive. “They will be on the edge of the ice. Watch for them.”

Russel looked out on the edge of the ice but saw no seals. The light was half gone now and he knew that he would have to leave the sled to hunt.

“I will leave you with the dogs and go out on foot.”

But now, Oogruk shook his head. “No. No. It is time to talk one more time and I must leave you. But I wanted to come out here for it because I missed the smell of the sea. I wanted to smell the sea one more time.”

Russel looked down in the sled at the old man. “You’re leaving me?”

“It is time to leave,” Oogruk said simply. “It is my time. But there is a thing you must do now to become a man. You must not go home.”

“Not go home? I do not understand.”

“You must leave with the dogs. Run long and find yourself. When you leave me you must head north and take meat and see the country. When you do that you will become a man. Run as long as you can. That’s what used to be. Once I ran for a year to find good birds’ eggs. Run with the dogs and become what the dogs will help you become. Do you understand?”

Russel remembered now when Oogruk had said he would take a long journey. He spoke quietly. “I think so. But you, what are you to do?”

“You will leave me here on the ice, out here by the edge of the sea.”

“With respect, Grandfather, I can’t do that. There is a doctor. Things can be done if something is bothering you.”

Oogruk shook his head. “An old man knows when death is coming and he should be left to his own on it. You will leave me here on the ice.”

“But. . .”

“You will leave me here on the ice.”

Russel said nothing. He didn’t help Oogruk, but the old man got out of the sled himself. When he was standing on the ice he motioned Russel away. “Go now.”

Russel couldn’t. He held back, held the sled. “I will stay with you.”

“You will go.” The milk-eyes looked through him to the sea, to the snow, to the line of blue that was the sky. “You will go now.”

And there was such strength in his voice that Russel knew he must go. He took the handlebar in one hand and pulled the hook, and the dogs surged away and Russel let them run without looking back. He went mile after mile, and finally he could stand it no more and he called the team around and headed back, his eyes scanning the ice in sweeps as they ran.

When they were still half a mile from where Oogruk had gotten off, Russel could see his small figure sitting on the ice and he smiled.

He would talk the old man into riding back to the village, that’s all there was to it. The old man would come back and tell him more about living the old way, would sit at night and tell the stories that made the winter nights short.

But when he drew close he saw that Oogruk was sitting still. Very still. His hands were folded in his lap and his legs were stretched out in front of him and the eyes were open and not blinking with life.

Russel stopped the team before the dogs were close to Oogruk and walked ahead on foot.

Oogruk did not turn his head but stared out to sea, out past the edge of ice where his spirit had flown, out and out. His face was already freezing and there was some blown snow in the corner of his eyes that didn't melt. Russel brushed the snow away with his mitten, a small gesture he made unknowingly, and a place in him wanted to smile and another place wanted to cry. "You left too soon, Grandfather. I was coming back for you."

He stood for a time looking down at the dead old man. Then he thought of something and he went back to the sled and took the small harpoon with the ivory toggle point from the weapons lashing. He put the harpoon across Oogruk's lap so that it balanced on his knees.

"You will want to hunt seals. Use it well and make much sweet meat."

Then he went to the sled. The dogs were nervous. They smelled the death and didn't like it. The leader whined and fidgeted and was glad when Russel called them around and headed north.

Before he let them run he turned back to Oogruk one more time. "I will remember you," he said, then let the dogs go.

He would run north for a time, then cut across the ice and head northeast into the land. He had weapons and dogs and a good sled. The rest would come from the land.

Everything would come from the land.