

Preparing for Literature Discussion Groups

Organizing and running literature discussion groups (also known by other names such as book clubs or literature circles) can be intimidating. Careful preparation goes a long way toward ensuring that your early attempts are successful, both for yourself and for your students. The following ideas, taken from Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson's *Getting Started With Literature Circles* (Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1999. ISBN 0-926842-97-8) may be helpful as you prepare.

- Clarify the goals for discussion, both for yourself and for your students
- Select a discussion format. Will you meet with one group at a time, with you assuming leadership? Will you meet with one group with you as a participant? Will one group meet at a time with you as observer? Will two or more groups meet at once while you move among them?
- Teach students how to find things to discuss. The instructions for response logs and Critical Reader Thoughts included in this program are designed to provide that sort of scaffolding. (Go to the *Engaging With Literature* Library Web site at www.learner.org/envisioningliterature and look under the support materials for Video Clip 4.)
- Show students how to gather information to share during discussion. Response logs and Critical Reader Thoughts are two strategies. In Video Clip 5, "Sharing the Text," we see BJ Namba encourage students to identify "golden lines" to share with classmates. In Video Clip 9, "Discussion Strategies," Barry Hoonan teaches students to use sticky notes to track their observations and questions.
- Teach students how to discuss literature. Hold a class discussion centered on "What Makes a Good Literature Discussion," listing student responses on an overhead slide or chart paper. Use discussions of shared readings to foreground strategies such as turn-taking, responding directly to what another has said, listening respectfully, and making connections between two comments from others. After small-group discussions, debrief the group on their discussion processes, encouraging those that were successful, and suggesting alternative behaviors for those that hindered discussion.

Above all, don't expect perfection the first time—from your students or from yourself. As you become more experienced, you will become more comfortable with the process—as will your students!