

WORKSHOP GUIDE

30
minutes



Literature Groups All Year Long



Jennifer Allen
with Carolyn Bridges

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Also by Jen Allen:
Becoming a Literacy Leader: Supporting Learning and Change (2006, Stenhouse)

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Introduction

Literature Groups All Year Long is a thirty-minute DVD filmed over eight months in Carolyn Bridges' fourth-grade classroom in Waterville, Maine. This guide is designed to help facilitators use *Literature Groups All Year Long* in workshop settings. The plans provided are flexible, allowing you to tailor the suggestions to the needs of your group.

The program can be used with groups of teachers examining literature groups in classrooms. Because the program highlights collaboration between a literacy coach and a classroom teacher, it might also be the focus of professional development for literacy coaches and mentors.

Jennifer Allen is a literacy specialist for grades three to five in Waterville, Maine, and the author of *Becoming a Literacy Leader* (Stenhouse, 2006). Carolyn Bridges is a fourth-grade teacher in Waterville, Maine, and her classroom is often an observation site for colleagues. Jennifer works for forty-five minutes three mornings a week in Carolyn's classroom during literacy workshops.

Jen and Carolyn are rarely seen without pads of sticky notes in hand. They continually take notes and reflect on what students are saying and doing throughout reading workshop. Planning is informed through student work and daily observations. Although they work from a curriculum they've designed together for the year, they are continually reflecting, refining, and adjusting daily, weekly, and monthly plans to match the needs of their students.

This program presents excerpts from their collaboration during October, February, and April as they worked together to help students develop independent skills during literature discussion groups.

Support materials for each section of this guide include:

1. Questions for Discussion
2. Classroom Extensions
3. Handouts of readings and reproducibles linked to DVD

chapters.

Literature Groups: Fall

In the opening segment, Jennifer and Carolyn launch literature groups. Students have been prepared to lead these groups on their own during the first six weeks of school. The books used in the discussion groups are *Stink: The Incredible Shrinking Kid* by Megan McDonald; *Jake Drake, Bully Buster* by Andrew Clements; and *The King of Show-and-Tell (Ready, Freddy!)* by Abby Klein.

As the groups meet for the first time, it quickly becomes evident that the children have different expectations for the groups than their teachers. The discussions are flat and unfocused. In the debriefs with Jennifer, Carolyn, and first-year teacher Jessica Soucy, the teachers reflect on the differences between what they expected to happen in these discussions and the reality.

To prepare to view the segment, you may want to distribute copies of the Two-Column Notes form (Appendix 5), and Jessica's Observation Notes (Appendix 4). Participants may want to read Appendix 1, "Preparation for Literature Groups" and Appendix 2 "Integrating Whole-Class Instruction with Literature Groups." By reading these before viewing the segment, participants will gain background information on the class, students, and collaboration between Jennifer and Carolyn. Ask participants to take two-column notes as they view the video.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is Jennifer's role in the group? What is Carolyn's role?
2. How do the discussions in these groups compare to litera-

ture discussions early in the year in your classroom?

3. How do Jessica's observations as a first-year teacher vary from Carolyn and Jen's observations?
4. Jessica uses an observation form to take notes. What are the protocols for observers in your school?

Classroom Extensions

1. Arrange for partner teams to observe literature groups in classrooms using the Blank Observation Form (Appendix 3). At a follow-up meeting, discuss what worked well with the form and how it might be adapted to better suit your school community's needs.
2. Focus your observations on one of the literature groups in your classroom. Focus in on student learning. What do you notice about the students' understanding of the text? How might you follow up with additional instructional to support students?
3. Show your students a clip of the student literature discussion from the fall and then the spring. Ask students to share their observations. What do they notice about the spring discussion? As a class, generate a list of expectations for literature group discussions.

Literature Groups: Winter

By mid-year, students have developed more independence in literature groups. The book used in discussion groups is *Mr. Lincoln's Way* by Patricia Polacco.

Jennifer and Carolyn are now in an observation role. In the debrief with Jeni Frazee, a third-grade teacher observing the groups, the teachers discuss their changing expectations for the group as well as connections across the grades.

To prepare to view the segment, you may want to distrib-

ute copies of the Two-Column Notes form (Appendix 5). Ask participants to take two-column notes as they view the video.

Questions for Discussion

1. How have Jennifer and Carolyn's roles in the groups changed since the fall?
2. Jeni is a third-grade teacher observing a fourth-grade classroom. What are the benefits of having teachers observe instruction in grades above or below their level?
3. How does the debrief with Jeni change Jennifer and Carolyn's perceptions of the literature groups?

Classroom Extensions

1. Invite a colleague into your room to observe your literature discussions. Take a few minutes in the middle of the literature discussion time to debrief what you both observed. What observations did you make in relation to how the literature discussions ran within the classroom? What did you observe about the students and their understanding of the text? How did the opportunity to observe and debrief with a peer benefit you as a teacher? What might be your next steps for instruction with the students?
2. Now swap to the role of observer in your colleague's classroom. Use the observation form to guide the observation. What benefit do you see from peer observations? What insights did you gain doing an observation of kids who are not your students?

Literature Groups: Spring

By April, students are fully independent in literature groups, and there are marked improvements in their discussion skills. Students are in the midst of an author study on Andrew Clements. The books used in the discussion groups are *The Jacket*, *Frindle*, and *Jake Drake, Class Clown*, all by Andrew Clements.

This segment features a group observation and debrief. Jessica and Jeni are joined by Leslie Lloyd, a third-grade teacher. To prepare to view the segment, you may want to distribute copies of the Two-Column Note form (Appendix 5). Ask participants to take two-column notes as they view the video.

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the biggest changes you notice in how students discuss the book?
2. What are the benefits of group observations with teachers? What are the drawbacks?
3. Jennifer and Carolyn note that they have moved from asking students to make connections to naturally integrating reading strategies into literature groups. What issues have emerged in your classroom in integrating strategy instruction with literature discussions?

Classroom Extensions

1. Try a group observation. Invite two colleagues into your room to observe your students' literature discussions. Take a few minutes to debrief the observation. What do you see as the benefits of a group observation? What did you

observe about the students and their understanding of the text?

2. Try another peer observation. This time, though, don't debrief during the lesson but rather hold off and debrief your observation later. What do you see as the benefits of debriefing in the midst of the lesson versus debriefing later, outside of the classroom? What are the drawbacks of in-the-midst debriefs?

Appendix 1

Preparation for Literature Groups

by Jennifer Allen and Carolyn Bridges

Preparing for literature group discussions begins in early September. We start off the year with whole-group instruction through an author study of Chris Van Allsburg. The purpose of this author study is to prepare the class for literature group expectations for the year. We spend the month of September reading Chris Van Allsburg books as a whole class. During this time, we review comprehension strategies; model strategies that good readers use before, during, and after reading; and introduce students to the graphic organizers that we will use throughout the year to help us hold our thinking. It is also during this time that we introduce students to literature group expectations.

In preparing for literature discussions, we introduce students to a few select roles outlined by Harvey Daniels in his book *Literature Circles* (Stenhouse, 2002). We focus on the roles of connector, questioner, illustrator, and passage master. We spend a total of four weeks introducing these concepts individually and explicitly to students. Students then have opportunities to practice the roles and layer on each additional role as they are introduced. By the end of the month, we expect students to come to discussions prepared for all the roles. We believe that good readers think about connections to the text, ask questions, visualize, and reflect on passages as they read all at once. We do not force students into each role but rather teach students to be aware of their thinking and encourage them to communicate their thinking within their literature discussions.

Although we introduce students to the roles of literature discussions, we actually never use role sheets. Instead, we ask students to hold their thinking on a large, lined sticky note as they read. We use the symbols **C** (connections), **Q** (questions), and **P** (passage master). We ask the illustrators to sketch out their visualizations on the back of their sticky notes and write a few words from the text that helped them create the mental pictures.

We also introduce the additional role of student facilitator. We ask students to rotate the responsibility of facilitating their discussions. The facilitator's main responsibility is to come to group prepared and to move the discussion along, encouraging participation from all group members.

As each role is introduced, we practice discussions as a whole class, sharing our thinking before breaking into smaller groups. We have found that students benefit from practicing discussions in a whole group. This allows students to hear lots of thinking from their peers and takes away the pressure of a select few having to carry the conversation.

Lessons Learned

After the fall taping of our literature discussions, we knew that we needed to take a few steps back because students needed additional modeling and guidance in literature discussions. We showed them the fall video footage and asked them to reflect and debrief with us on what they observed about their discussions. Students articulated that this was not the type of discussion they were aiming for.

They shared during our whole-class debrief that they wanted a discussion in which classmates responded to one another and didn't simply talk around a circle by reading off their sticky notes. We shared with students that we wanted them to talk about books and share their excitement the same way they talk after seeing a really good movie.

We decided that students might benefit from additional practice with whole-group discussions before breaking into small groups. So we incorporated a whole-class home reading book, *How to Eat Fried Worms* by Thomas Rockwell. Every morning, we started the day just talking about our home reading as a class. This serves as another model for a literature discussion.

Over time, we encouraged students to jot down thinking on their sticky notes and mark this thinking with the symbol T. This symbol was used for any thinking that did not fit neatly into the other categories.

We also continued to debrief the literature discussions with students throughout the year. We felt that debriefing with students was another way to scaffold the success of later discussions.

Here we are a year after the original filming, preparing a new group of students for a year of literature group discussions. We will take what we have learned from the filming experience and incorporate our new thinking into supporting student-led literature discussions. We will continue to provide students with video models of literature discussions, opportunities to debrief their own discussions, and also encourage them to share their thinking beyond the traditional roles of literature circles.

Appendix 2

Integrating Whole-Class Instruction with Literature Groups

by Jennifer Allen and Carolyn Bridges

Throughout the year, literature groups are flexible and always changing. We weave in and out between whole-group and small-group instruction. Groupings are never stagnant. Students may be grouped according to interests, genres, or specific needs.

There are several times during the year when we integrate whole-group instruction with literature groups. We use whole-group instruction in the beginning of the school year when preparing students for literature groups and throughout the year when introducing the class to new or difficult literary concepts.

We start off the year as a whole group studying the work of Chris Van Allsburg. We choose to start off working as a whole group so that we can maximize instructional time by teaching the whole class the expectations for literature groups that they will participate in throughout the year. During this time, students are introduced to reading strategies that we promote throughout the year with various books. Instead of breaking students into small groups right from the start, we find it benefits all students to participate in the whole-group modeling and thinking. Starting out with whole-group instruction fosters a sense of classroom community. The author study provides a common foundation that we can build on throughout the year.

We also use some whole-group instruction throughout the year when teaching new or difficult concepts. Between literature group books, we will often transition with a whole-group picture book. Picture books are a vehicle in which students can investigate more difficult concepts with shorter texts. We often find that fourth-graders struggle and are not confident with the concept of finding themes within books. During the winter filming of literature groups, students worked with the book *Mr. Lincoln's Way* by Patricia Polacco. This is just one example of how we worked as a class layering several picture books to investigate the concept of theme.

Appendix 3: Blank Observation Form

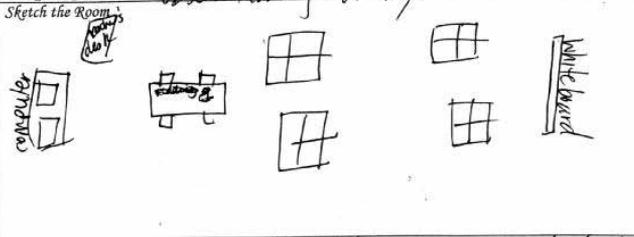
*Observation Notes**Host Teacher:**Date:**Purpose for Visit:**Sketch the Room**Focus of Lesson:*

<i>Zone in on...</i>	<i>Distribution of Time</i>	<i>What Do You Notice?</i>	<i>What Do You Wonder?</i>	<i>What Might You Like to Try?</i>
<i>Teacher (What is the teacher doing?)</i>				
<i>Student Engagement (What are the students doing?)</i>				
<i>Materials</i>				
<i>Environment</i>				
<i>Assessment (How do you know the students are "getting" it?)</i>				

Appendix 4: Jessica's Observation Notes

Observation Notes

Host Teacher: Carolyn Briday ^{Allen} Date: Oct. 13, 2004
 Purpose for Visit: Observe Reading Workshop



Focus of Lesson: Literature discussion focusing on character traits

Carolyn's comments on the room writing skullsbook and about Frank packet

Carolyn comments on how she set up the room - it's natural

in writing just if want asked by? in send writing to help + research of thinking - it go back to those notes be modeled + strategy by over sing in a self-life structure

Zone in On....	Distribution of Time	What Do You Notice?	What Do You Wonder?	What Might You Like to Try?
Teacher (What is the teacher doing?)	guides review of focus stops group when it's about writing - give them a pep talk - the purpose is to talk about it	Jen + Carolyn w/ group - one group on their own - that's it!	is this their 1st and 2nd meeting? how did Carolyn prepare them for lit. circle?	my original idea for my lit. circles now seems a little "too much" - why not keep it simple and focus on one thing - character traits - build confidence + self-procedures for lit. circles.
Student Engagement (What are the students doing?)	students get into groups	students knew exactly where to go in the room facilitator goes first - w/ questions + connections	are their still "roles" like questioner, connector, etc. - Or does the facilitator mainly guide the discussion?	
Materials	Reading folder post-its book sharpie markers short paper	post-its are so important to hold thinking that's all they really need!	6-8 post-its on character traits on small white boards.	Carolyn has a packet w/ roles and chapters already written out for students.
Environment		Students		I really like the writers table box on the bulletin board - like a writer's word wall
Assessment (How do you know the students are "getting" it?)	the students "jump in" and start conversation	the majority of the time who speak talking about the book even w/ the group who didn't have a teacher	How do you assess the group? get a post-it for each student	the venn diagram on the whiteboard (on chart paper) different roles post-its go in for diff. character

do it... anyway do have that right

Appendix 5: Two-Column Notes

What I Notice	What I Wonder