

Literature Circle Roles

Before we look at the basic roles, a few comments: First of all, as we have already said, the roles sheets are supposed to be transitional, temporary devices. *The goal of all role sheets is to make role sheets obsolete.* Secondly, all of these task descriptions are designed to support genuine *collaborative learning* by giving kids clearly defined, interlocking jobs to do. Further, the sheets enact some important ideas about *reading*: among these, that readers who approach a text with their prior knowledge activated and with some clear-cut, conscious *purpose* will comprehend more. So the roles sheets are meant to help kids read better and discuss better. There is also a management dimension to the role sheets: whenever teachers move to a decentralized cooperative group structure, they are essentially giving up some degree of direct guidance over the kids, and so the role sheets are a kind of teacher surrogate- -a written guide to the work at hand.

How do these sheets figure in a real-life literature circle group meeting? They exist to help spark or sustain natural conversation, not to guide or provide the bulk of the talk. This means that when a group sits down to talk, the conversation may be started by anyone, may take off in any direction, and needn't return. There's no obligation to "work through" any or all of the notes on people's role sheets. Indeed, if kids or teachers misconstrue the role sheets as the main focus of a group's interaction, then literature circles are just marching mechanically through their roles, reading their notes aloud. There will be no interaction, debate, challenge, give-and-take, no building on other people's ideas and interpretations. Such misdirected groups tend to finish their "discussion" quickly and then stare at each other with nothing left to say.

This is why we often tell students that in a successful literature circle meeting you may never refer to your role sheets. After all, if everyone comes to the group with lots to talk about, who needs a sheet? Especially in the beginning days of literature circles, we make sure that students don't mistake the role sheets for a business-as-usual worksheet in disguise. Since respecting students' ideas and inviting genuine conversation into the classroom is contrary to most kids' experiences of schooling, we have to highlight the shift in expectations that literature circles embody.

In mature literature circle classrooms, role sheets are usually abandoned when groups are capable of lively, text-centered, multifaceted book discussions drawn from open-ended entries in *response logs*. How do groups reach this stage? By using the roles for a good while, repeatedly adopting a half-dozen different angles on their reading; by amassing a repertoire of group discussion roles; and by practicing within a safe structure until less guidance is needed. Once kids have used a variety of roles and had plenty of successful group meetings, then the structured roles are less necessary, and wise teachers phase them out, replacing them with a reading log. After all, the goal of literature circles is to have natural and sophisticated discussions of literature- -and once that is happening, we want to remove any artificial or limiting elements immediately.

Assignment for tomorrow p____ -p____

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Name

Group

Book

Assignment p_____ -p_____

Questioner: Your job is to write down a few questions that you have about this part of the book. What were you wondering about while you were reading? Did you have questions about what was happening? What a word meant? What a character did? What was going to happen next? Why the author used a certain style? Or what the whole thing meant? Just try to notice what you are wondering while you read, and jot down some of those questions either along the way or after you're finished.

Questions about today's reading:

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Name _____

Group _____

Book _____

Assignment p_____ -p_____

Literary Luminary: Your job is to locate a few special sections or quotations in the text for your group to talk over. The idea is to help people go back to some interesting, powerful, funny, puzzling, or important sections of the reading and think about them more carefully. As you decide which passages or paragraphs are worth going back to, make a note why you picked each one. Then jot down some plans for how they should be shared. You can read passages aloud yourself, ask someone else to read them, or have people read them silently and then discuss.

Page No. &
Paragraph

Reason for Picking

Plan for Reading

Assignment for tomorrow p_____ -p_____

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Name

Group

Book

Assignment p___ -p___

Illustrator: Good readers make pictures in their minds as they read. This is a chance to share some of your own images and visions. Draw some kind of picture related to the reading you have just done. It can be a sketch, cartoon, diagram, flowchart, or stick-figure scene. You can draw a picture of something that happened in your book, or something that the reading reminded you of, or a picture that conveys any idea or feeling you got from the reading. Any kind of drawing or graphic is okay—you can even label things with words if that helps. *Make your drawing on the other side of this sheet or on a separate sheet.*

Presentation plan: Whenever it fits in the conversation, show our drawing to your group. You don't necessarily have to explain it. You can let people speculate what your picture means, so they can connect your drawing to their own ideas about the reading. After everyone has had a say, you can always have the last word: tell them what your picture means, where it comes from, or what it represents to you.

Assignment for tomorrow p___ -p___

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CONNECTOR



SET
A

Name

Group

Book

Assignment p____ -p____

Connector: Your job is to find connections between the book and you, and between the book and the wider world. This means connecting the reading to your own past experiences, to happenings at school or in the community, to stories in the news, to similar events at other times and places, to other people or problems that you are reminded of. You may also see connections between this book and other writings on the same topic, or by the same author.

Some connections I made between this reading and my own experiences, the wider world, and other texts or authors:

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