

Interactive Reading with Reading Circles

Kathy Green
English Language Fellow
Irkutsk State University
klgree@gmail.com

*Designed in
collaboration with
Ana Maria Ferraro
English Language
Fellow – Kazan
Federal University

What is a reading circle?

- 0 Background: An instructional approach for helping English language learners improve reading comprehension and overall language proficiency
- 0 Definition: A reading activity where students, in a small group, read the same text, then discuss it. Each student in that group has a different role to play in the whole group's overall understanding of the reading.

How does a reading circle work?

- 0 Each student is assigned a role.
 - 0 Different readings = different roles
- 0 Students prepare for their assigned role (use a role sheet).
- 0 The teacher is the facilitator, and prepares *all* roles.
- 0 Make sure the roles lead toward achievement of instructional goals:
 - 0 development of reading, speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills.

What kinds of roles are there?

- 0 The types of roles you assign to students will depend on the type of text you want them to discuss, the students' proficiency level, and your instructional goals.
- 0 To get an idea, let's look at four different of student roles.
- 0 Be specific when assigning roles.
 - 0 Write 5 questions about Chapter 1
 - 0 Find 3 new vocabulary words that are necessary to understand the text

Roles – Example 1

0 Discussion Director

- 0 Develop five questions about the text to share with the group

0 Literary Luminary

- 0 Pinpoint important parts of the text to stimulate thinking and elicit interesting facts

0 Illustrator

- 0 Draw pictures related to the reading and share drawings with the group

0 Summarizer

- 0 Recall what happened in the reading and prepare a summary

0 Vocabulary Enricher

- 0 Find, define, and discuss new or difficult words

Roles – Example 2

0 **The Questioner**

- 0 Writes questions about an article to ask group members

0 **Word Watcher**

- 0 Finds new words, writes definitions, teaches other group members

0 **Key Idea Person**

- 0 Find key ideas from each body paragraph

0 **Illustrator**

- 0 Draw diagrams of different organizational styles in the article / organize the important information in a graph or chart

0 **Police Officer**

- 0 Make sure the other group members are doing their jobs, lead the discussion

Roles – Example 3

0 Illuminator:

- 0 Find an important supporting detail or something *you* think is interesting

0 Connector:

- 0 Explain how this text is connected to another text, video, podcast, etc. How is it similar or different?

0 Secretary:

- 0 Take notes of the group discussion and report the main points to the whole class.

Roles – Example 4

0 Discussion Leader

- 0 Prepare general questions about the story, make sure everyone participates in the discussion.

0 Summarizer

- 0 Make notes about characters, events, ideas, and key points. Retell the story in a short summary

0 Connector

- 0 Find connections between the story and the world outside, your own experiences, or real life events

0 Word Master

- 0 Identify 5 words that are important for this story (page and line #)

0 Passage Person

- 0 Find important, informative, confusing, surprising, well-written passages

0 Culture Collector

- 0 Look for differences and similarities between your culture and the story culture

Why should I use reading circles?

- 0 To promote team building and collaborative learning
- 0 To promote critical thinking
- 0 To keep your classroom student-centered.
- 0 Because research shows that reading circles:
 - 0 Develop students' comprehension skills
 - 0 Support strategies like visualizing, connecting, questioning, inferring, and analyzing

Why should I use reading circles?

- 0 To increase student participation in a low-stress environment
- 0 To increase the sense of ownership and responsibility for students
- 0 To engage students in critical thinking and reflection
- 0 To provide opportunities for students to use the target language for *real* communication

Why should I use reading circles?

- 0 So students can use a variety of strengths and skills to prepare for a lesson.
- 0 So students learn to respond critically to what they have read and support their ideas with textual details.
- 0 To provide additional scaffolding for students
- 0 To reinforce writing skills – students prepare for discussion circles by doing research and taking notes

What can go wrong?

- 0 Roles can be too open and students feel like they don't know what to do.
 - 0 Narrow down the tasks to help students feel comfortable, especially in the beginning. Model what they are supposed to do by providing examples and prompts.
- 0 Low level students can't/won't participate.
 - 0 Make a role that they *can* do. Make it product oriented so they have something to show for their work.

What can go wrong?

- 0 Reading circle embers come to class unprepared.
 - 0 Find a way for them to participate anyway.
 - 0 Have them take notes, look for information in the text, ask questions, summarize the group discussion in writing
 - 0 Have the rest of the group decide what should happen with students who come unprepared.
 - 0 Last resort? If everyone's getting lazy, randomly collect everyone's notes and grade them to make sure everyone starts participating again.

Beyond reading circles

- 0 Team-building activities

 - 0 Membership Grid

- 0 Extension Activities

 - 0 Drawing

 - 0 Book Pass

 - 0 Save the Last Word for Me

- 0 Texts

 - 0 Types

 - 0 Examples: The Story of an Hour, The Giving Tree

Texts

- 0 Poems
- 0 Short stories
- 0 Articles
- 0 Teacher-selected texts
- 0 Student-selected texts
- 0 Movies, TV shows, news programs
- 0 Podcasts

Reading Circle- The Story of an Hour

- 0 Form groups of six. Decide on your roles:
 - 0 Discussion leader
 - 0 Summarizer
 - 0 Connector
 - 0 Word master
 - 0 Passage person
 - 0 Culture collector

- 0 Review of roles

Discussion Leader

- 0 Read the story twice and prepare at least five general questions about it. (characters, theme, ending, predictions)
- 0 Ask one or two questions to start the Reading Circle discussion.
- 0 Make sure everyone has a chance to speak and joins in the discussion.
- 0 Call on each member to present their prepared role information.
- 0 Guide the discussion and keep it going.

Summarizer

- 0 Read the story twice
- 0 Make notes about the characters, events, and ideas
- 0 Find the key points that everyone must know to understand the story
- 0 Retell the story in a short summary (1-2 minutes) in your own words.
- 0 Talk about your summary, using your written notes to help you.

Connector

- 0 Read the story twice and look for connections between the story and the world outside.
- 0 Make notes about at least two possible connections to your own experiences, or to the experiences of friends and family, or to real-life events.
- 0 Tell the group the connections and ask for their comments and questions.
- 0 Ask the group if they can think of any connections themselves.

Word Master

- 0 Read the story, and look for words or short phrases that are new or difficult to understand, or that are important in the story.
- 0 Choose five words (only five) that you think are important for this story.
- 0 Explain the meanings of these five words in simple English to the group.
- 0 Tell the group why these words are important for understanding the story.
- 0 The words you choose might be repeated often, used in an unusual way, or be important to the meaning of the story.

Passage Person

- 0 Read the story and find important, interesting, or difficult passages.
- 0 Make notes about at least three passages that are important for the plot, or that explain the characters, or that have very interesting or powerful language
- 0 Read each passage to the group, or ask another group member to read it
- 0 Ask the group one or two questions about each passage.
- 0 A passage can be from 1-2 sentences to a paragraph or a short piece of dialogue.

Culture Collector

- 0 Read the story and look for both differences and similarities between your own culture and the culture found in the story.
- 0 Make notes about two or three passages that show these cultural points.
- 0 Read each passage to the group, or ask another group member to read it.
- 0 Ask the group some questions about these, and any other cultural points in the story.
- 0 To help you think about cultural differences, consider the theme of the story (what is it about?) and if that is an important theme in your culture.
- 0 Also, do the characters do or say things that people in your culture do? What about in other cultures?

Directions

- 0 Read the story twice.
- 0 Follow the directions for your role.
- 0 Follow the guidance of your Discussion Leader and discuss The Story of an Hour.

Resources

- 0 Chopin, Kate. The Story of an Hour.
- 0 Daniels, H. and Steineke, N. (2004). Mini-lessons for Literature Circles. Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.
- 0 Elhess, M. and Egbert, J. Literature Circles as Support for Language Development. *English Teaching Forum* 53 (3).
- 0 Furr, Mark. Literary Circles