

Literature Circles for Generation Z: Enriching Literacy Experiences through Technology Integration

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Implementing literature circles in K-12 classroom provides students opportunities to take ownership of their learning. Teachers can maximize students' learning through social justice practices. Providing students equitable access to resources where they choose, collaborate, create, and communicate in safe spaces is conducive to students' cognitive and personal development. Integrating digital tools is an interactive way for students to enhance their literature circle experiences. Students use digital tools to demonstrate their understanding of literacy concepts. Literature circles can be assessed and modified based upon grade level and students' needs. Digital literature circles provide students opportunities to critically analyze literature while collaborating with others in an interactive format. Implementation, formats, resources, and assessments to infuse technology in literature circles while promoting equity and social justice concepts will be presented.

Introduction

Students born in the 21st century are considered "digital natives", as they were born into a technology-infused society (Prensky, 2001). Research has found that many students spend about nine hours a day online chatting, blogging, watching YouTube videos, or visiting online communities (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). Engaging students in reading literature often proves to be a challenging feat for educators. Literature circles attract students' reading interests more than the traditional reading of literary works and summarizing activities and arouse their reading desire for literary works because the students in literature circles find a collaborative and cooperative social learning atmosphere (Karatay, 2017). Additionally, web-enhanced literature circles are literacy-based experiences that can capture students' interest, so students will delve into reading not only for educational purposes, but also for enjoyment. In the 21st century the roots of literacy may also include knowledge about digital forms of reading (Beschorner, B., Hutchison, A., 2013). Students transition from being consumers of

technology to producers, demonstrating their knowledge of concepts through multi-media platforms. An awareness of social equity, diversity, awareness, and understanding develop through participation in digital literature circles.

Traditional Literature Circles

Traditional literature circles have been widely implemented in classrooms nationwide for decades. They remain an integral component in a balanced literacy program (Day & Kroon, 2010). Whether the literature circle is in a primary or intermediate classroom, teachers must first model how to conduct literature circles and what the expectations are. Starting small works best when beginning anything new, and literature circles are no exception. Introducing literature circles to one group at a time allows the students and teacher to become familiar with their roles and processes. As groups are developed, the teacher assigns role responsibilities for each group member or allow students to select their own roles. Roles vary due to participants and literature selection, yet the following discussion roles are consistently

used (e.g., discussion director, literary luminary, vocabulary enricher, summarizer, and connector).

Collaboration is one of the critical components of a successful literature circle, as the literary experience must be a transaction between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1983). Collaborative conversations need ample time to have rich text discussions. Creative teachers organize literature circles where students can interact with others virtually and in-person. The teacher's role is that of a facilitator to ensure that students are actively engaged in the group discussions. Intentional grouping of students honors individual and group identity. Teachers emphasize the unique contributions of group members in the learning process. An emphasis on students' social-emotional and dispositional learning through independent and group experiences in literature circles provide students' outlets for self-expression and awareness. Within literature circles, students are able to value multiple perspectives that may differ from their own.

Digital Literature Circles

Students in the 21st century are more likely to have experiences with technology devices outside of school than in the classroom setting. They regularly use mobile devices for social purposes rather than for academic purposes. Supplementing technology into classroom instruction may be an effective way for educators to meet the needs of their students.

Literature circles that are integrated with technology meet numerous common core standards. Kindergarten through fifth-grade literacy standards are addressed through literature circles. Students must be able to critically analyze a variety of text selections, collaborate with others, make inferences, understand plot development, and make connections within text selections. All types

of literature can be purposeful for literature circles though ones that evoke students' interests or real-world topics are highly motivating and may lead to critical conversations while supporting students' learning. Literature regarding social justice themes provide a safe space for students to discuss topics they might otherwise avoid or feel uncomfortable discussing.

Integration of technology can be a resourceful way to meet the needs of all learners. Technology standards designed by the International Society for Technology (ISTE, 2021) for teachers and students, are a framework for planning, implementing, and assessing literature circles. The simplest way to integrate technology into literature circles would be to allow students to read selections in a digital format. Reading the text is not the primary function of participating in a literature circle. Critical thinking, valuing others' perspectives and synthesizing key points and events in the text are fundamental elements of literature circle discussions. Teachers are often concerned that technology isolates students in a collaborative classroom (Bowers-Campbell, 2011). Research indicates the opposite as students are learning positive interdependence and participating in collaborative conversations through virtual formats. Additionally, students may feel open to asking questions or seek clarification when they feel they are in a safe environment.

Utilizing technology in literature circles via educational websites and apps is a way to actively engage 21st century learners. Teachers must select educational resources with student safety in mind. Selecting resources that can be in a closed and private community which can only be accessed by the teacher and students is critical when having students using technology in the classroom (Dobler, 2013). When introducing digital resources, teachers are encouraged to start small by introducing a few of the websites and apps in the regular classroom

setting to ensure students can successfully use the resources before integrating them into literature circles. Students are then able to select which digital tool they feel would best showcase their information. Table 1 presents a sample representation of digital resources

students can use to complete their role sheets in their literature circles. Many of the resources are free, while some of them require a minimal service subscription.

Table 1: Digital Resources for Literature Circles

Discussion Director	Literary Luminary	Vocabulary Enricher	Summarizer	Connector
Blog Google Doc Timetoast Edmodo Recap Whiteboard	Little Bird Tales Blabberize BitStrips Popplet Buncee	Quizlet Coggle Padlet Wordle	Glogster Breaking News FaceTalk Flipgrid WordPress	Popplet Recap Bubble Fakebook Sway

The number of digital resources should vary depending upon the age level of the students. Limiting the resources to two for each role for primary students in grades K-3 and three to five for students in intermediate grades (4-6) provides students choice while providing parameters. Resources for students beyond the intermediate grades (7-12) may choose any digital resource they feel would best showcase their work. The assistance of classroom volunteers and teacher assistants would benefit students in primary grades as they work with digital resources.

Students complete their role sheets for selected readings and bring them to designated meetings to discuss the text within traditional literature circles. Sharing their information with digital resources would be a slight adjustment, yet the process would need to be modeled for students as a group before allowing literature circle groups to complete them independently. Web-based sharing applications such as Google Docs, Sway, and Collaborate, Zoom enable groups to share their work and discuss the text with other group members. Teachers would need to set up the groups within the program and share the links with the members of each group. Students would then upload their work to the

site to share with peers. At designated online or on-ground meetings, students would discuss their work with the group members to analyze and critique the literature.

Traditional class discussions are commonly dominated by high-performing, or talkative students. This format is conventionally not conducive to learning for students who are shy, have low self-esteem, or are not considered to be high-performing students. Educators may tailor their groups and activities based upon their students' learning styles. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 2011) are able to be infused in the literature circle tasks to assist students as they work within their comfort zones. Linguistic, musical, and intrapersonal learners may enjoy listening to the text in an audio format. Bodily-kinesthetic and spatial learners might prefer to have a printed text to physically hold and mark-up. Valuing and respecting students' learning preferences demonstrate equitable practices in education.

Teachers would also have access to monitor the group site to comment on students' work, share resources with them, or check students' individual or group participation. Once students become familiar with the technology tools, they can govern

their own learning and how they want to share their work with others (Edmondson, 2012; Granito & Chernobilsky, 2012). The groups' workspaces are often shared during a Showcase event to highlight important points or display visual representations. Moreover, teachers can bridge the gap between home and school by distributing the digital content to parents to keep them up to date on their children's learning.

Assessments for the literature circles could also follow this format. Teachers may assess students through web-based presentations to check students' understanding of the literary text. Writing a book review, developing a book trailer, or presenting a reenactment through digital mediums are valid ways for readers to synthesize and reflect on their reading experiences. Performance-oriented projects

can enhance students' learning in comparison to traditional assessment methods. Likewise, many websites and apps are available to use for assessment purposes as well. Authentic assessments that are engaging and meaningful to students yield high results. When students can apply what they have learned through methods other than traditional assessment formats, their effectiveness and enjoyment of learning increases (Gardner, Holmes, & Leitch, 2009). Table 2 lists a few digital resources for teachers to use while assessing students. The digital resources listed in each section are not limited to the category they are in. Teachers may choose to assess the literature circles analytically as they complete tasks, or holistically through a culminating activity or presentation.

Table 2: Digital Literature Circle Assessments

Individual Assessments	Group Assessments
Glogster Kahoot PacMan EdPuzzle WebQuest	Socrative Jeopardy IMovie Powtoons Quizlet

Assessing students as they complete their digital assignments is a valuable way for teachers to plan whole group instruction. Although specific information varies through text selections, the literary skills being discussed within the groups are similar. Observant and mindful teachers will use these experiences to provide relevant instruction tailored to meet the students' needs. Although the teacher's role in literature circles is more of a facilitator than a director, teachers can use the conversations and digital work created by students to use as mini-lessons in the classroom.

A literature circle showcase after the completion of each book is a way to include parents, school personnel, and community

members. This is an opportunity for students to take ownership of their work and share their literature circle experiences with others. Moreover, inviting classrooms within the school may entice other teachers to begin implementing literature circles with their students. Showcase events should be held at various times of the day to meet the needs and availability of parents and community members.

Incorporating literature circles in the classroom setting engages students while meeting the needs of all learners. Providing opportunities for children to engage in well-structured literature circles, increases their comprehension and attitudes toward reading (Daniels, 2006). When students are actively

engaged in activities, they want to participate and take ownership of their work. Students become critical thinkers, collaborators, creators while demonstrating their understanding of concepts and skills. Providing students with opportunities to interact with literature is a recipe to promote avid lifelong readers.

Literature circles are not limited to the individual classroom environment. Although this is the suggested way to begin implementing literature circles, educators can extend the learning well beyond the individual classroom setting. Teachers may choose to partner with grade-level colleagues to work collaboratively with literature circle groups. Extension possibilities could be to partner with other grade levels within and beyond their schools, state, or nation. Fostering social relationships beyond the classroom walls connect students to peers throughout the world. Students gain perspectives from others whom they may never otherwise meet.

Within a global society, communication accessibility has become increasingly

mainstream. Students in classrooms across the nation can potentially be reading, collaborating, communicating, and building healthy relationships with peers as they participate in literature circle groups. Through this medium, a social justice framework is evident. Teachers can promote recognition of cultural differences with respect and tolerance for differing cultures and communities (Gardner, Holmes, Leitch, 2009) by connecting global learners. Website applications such as Kidblog or Edmodo provide participants collaboration with peers globally, similar to traditional face-to-face meetings. Equitable practices to promote social justice for all students regardless of their ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender identity, or religion validate their contributions and learning. Through the participation in global literature circle groups, students have opportunities to extend their reading experiences beyond the classroom while critically analyzing literature.

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