

Literature Circle Guide:

A Wrinkle in Time

by Tara McCarthy

S C H O L A S T I C
PROFESSIONAL BOOKS

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| To the Teacher | 4 |
| Using the <i>Literature Circle Guides</i> in Your Classroom | 5 |
| Setting Up Literature Response Journals | 7 |
| The Good Discussion | 8 |
| About <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> | 9 |
| About the Author: Madeleine L'Engle | 9 |
| Enrichment Readings: The Nature of Science Fiction, Guardian Spirits, Family Stories | 10 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Before Reading the Book | 13 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Before Reading the Book | 14 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapter 1 | 15 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapter 1 | 16 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapters 2-3 | 17 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapters 2-3 | 18 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapter 4 | 19 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapter 4 | 20 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapters 5-6 | 21 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapters 5-6 | 22 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapters 7-8 | 23 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapters 7-8 | 24 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapter 9 | 25 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapter 9 | 26 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapters 10-11 | 27 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapters 10-11 | 28 |
| Literature Response Journal Reproducible: Chapter 12 | 29 |
| Group Discussion Reproducible: Chapter 12 | 30 |
| Reproducible: After Reading | 31 |
| Reproducible: Individual Projects/Group Projects | 32 |
| Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet | 33 |

To the Teacher

As a teacher, you naturally want to instill in your students the habits of confident, critical, independent, and lifelong readers. You hope that even when students are not in school they will seek out books on their own, think about and question what they are reading, and share those ideas with friends. An excellent way to further this goal is by using literature circles in your classroom.

In a literature circle, students select a book to read as a group. They think and write about it on their own in a literature response journal and then discuss it together. Both journals and discussions enable students to respond to a book and develop their insights into it. They also learn to identify themes and issues, analyze vocabulary, recognize writing techniques, and share ideas with each other—all of which are necessary to meet state and national standards.

This guide provides the support materials for using literature circles with *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. The reading strategies, discussion questions, projects, and enrichment readings will also support a whole class reading of this text or can be given to enhance the experience of an individual student reading the book as part of a reading workshop.

Literature Circles

A literature circle consists of several students (usually three to five) who agree to read a book together and share their observations, questions, and interpretations. Groups may be organized by reading level or choice of book. Often these groups read more than one book together since, as students become more comfortable talking with one another, their observations and insights deepen.

When planning to use literature circles in your classroom, it can be helpful to do the following:

- * Recommend four or five books from which students can choose. These books might be grouped by theme, genre, or author.

- * Allow three or four weeks for students to read each book. Each of Scholastic's *Literature Circle Guides* has the same number of sections as well as enrichment activities and projects. Even if students are reading different books in the *Literature Circle Guide* series, they can be scheduled to finish at the same time.
- * Create a daily routine so students can focus on journal writing and discussions.
- * Decide whether students will be reading books in class or for homework. If students do all their reading for homework, then allot class time for sharing journals and discussions. You can also alternate silent reading and writing days in the classroom with discussion groups.

Read More About Literature Circles

Getting the Most from Literature Groups
by Penny Strube (Scholastic Professional
Books, 1996)

Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels
(Stenhouse Publishers, 1994)

Using the *Literature Circle Guides* in Your Classroom

Each guide contains the following sections:

- * background information about the author and book
- * enrichment readings relevant to the book
- * Literature Response Journal reproducibles
- * Group Discussion reproducibles
- * Individual and group projects
- * Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

Background Information and Enrichment Readings

The background information about the author and the book and the enrichment readings are designed to offer information that will enhance students' understanding of the book. You may choose to assign and discuss these sections before, during, or after the reading of the book. Because each enrichment concludes with questions that invite students to connect it to the book, you can use this section to inspire them to think and record their thoughts in the literature response journal.

Literature Response Journal Reproducibles

Although these reproducibles are designed for individual students, they should also be used to stimulate and support discussions in literature circles. Each page begins with a reading strategy and follows with several journal topics. At the bottom of the page, students select a type of response (prediction, question, observation, or connection) for free-choice writing in their response journals.

◆ Reading Strategies

Since the goal of the literature circle is to empower lifelong readers, a different reading strategy is introduced in each section. Not only does the reading strategy allow students to understand this particular book better, it also instills a habit of mind that will continue to be useful when they read other books. A question from the Literature Response Journal and the Group Discussion pages is always tied to the reading strategy.

If everyone in class is reading the same book, you may present the reading strategy as a mini-lesson to the entire class. For literature circles, however, the group of students can read over and discuss the strategy together at the start of class and then experiment with the strategy as they read silently for the rest of the period. You may want to allow time at the end of class so the group can talk about what they noticed as they read. As an alternative, the literature circle can review the reading strategy for the next section after they have completed their discussion. That night, students can try out the reading strategy as they read on their own so they will be ready for the next day's literature circle discussion.

◆ Literature Response Journal Topics

A literature response journal allows a reader to "converse" with a book. Students write questions, point out things they notice about the story, recall personal experiences, and make connections to other texts in their journals. In other words, they are using writing to explore what they think about the book. See page 7 for tips on how to help students set up their literature response journals.

1. The questions for the literature response journals have no right or wrong answers but are designed to help students look beneath the surface of the plot and develop a richer connection to the story and its characters.
2. Students can write in their literature response journals as soon as they have finished a reading assignment. Again, you may choose to have students do this for homework or make time during class.
3. The literature response journals are an excellent tool for students to use in their literature circles. They can highlight ideas and thoughts in their journals that they want to share with the group.
4. When you evaluate students' journals, consider whether they have completed all the assignments and have responded in depth and thoughtfully. You may want to check each day to make sure students are keeping up with the assignments. You can read and respond to the journals at a halfway point (after five entries) and again at the end. Some teachers suggest that students pick out their five best entries for a grade.

Group Discussion Reproducibles

These reproducibles are designed for use in literature circles. Each page begins with a series of discussion questions for the group to consider. A mini-lesson on an aspect of the writer's craft follows the discussion questions. See page 8 for tips on how to model good discussions for students.

◆ **Literature Discussion Questions:** In a literature discussion, students experience a book from different points of view. Each reader brings her or his own unique observations, questions, and associations to the text. When students share their different reading experiences, they often come to a wider and deeper understanding than they would have reached on their own.

The discussion is not an exercise in finding the right answers nor is it a debate. Its goal is to explore the many possible meanings of a book. Be sure to allow enough time for these conversations to move beyond easy answers—try to schedule 25–35 minutes for each one. In addition, there are important guidelines to ensure that everyone's voice is heard.

1. Let students know that participation in the literature discussion is an important part of their grade. You may choose to watch one discussion and grade it. (You can use the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet on page 33.)
2. Encourage students to evaluate their own performance in discussions using the Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet. They can assess not only their own level of involvement but also how the group itself has functioned.
3. Help students learn how to talk to one another effectively. After a discussion, help them process what worked and what didn't. Videotape discussions if possible, and then evaluate them together. Let one literature circle watch another and provide feedback to it.

4. It can be helpful to have a facilitator for each discussion. The facilitator can keep students from interrupting each other, help the conversation get back on track when it digresses, and encourage shyer members to contribute. At the end of each discussion, the facilitator can summarize everyone's contributions and suggest areas for improvement.

5. Designate other roles for group members. For instance, a recorder can take notes and/or list questions for further discussion. A summarizer can open each literature circle meeting by summarizing the chapter(s) the group has just read. Encourage students to rotate these roles, as well as that of the facilitator.

◆ **The Writer's Craft:** This section encourages students to look at the writer's most important tool—words. It points out new vocabulary, writing techniques, and uses of language. One or two questions invite students to think more deeply about the book and writing in general. These questions can either become part of the literature circle discussion or be written about in students' journals.

Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet

Both you and your students will benefit from completing these evaluation sheets. You can use them to assess students' performance, and as mentioned above, students can evaluate their own individual performances, as well as their group's performance. The Literature Discussion Evaluation Sheet appears on page 33.

Setting Up Literature Response Journals

Although some students may already keep literature response journals, others may not know how to begin. To discourage students from merely writing elaborate plot summaries and to encourage them to use their journals in a meaningful way, help them focus their responses around the following elements: predictions, observations, questions, and connections.

Have students take time after each assigned section to think about and record their responses in their journals. Sample responses appear below.

◆ **Predictions:** Before students read the book, have them study the cover and the jacket copy. Ask if anyone has read any other books by Madeleine L'Engle. To begin their literature response journals, tell students to jot down their impressions about the book. As they read, students will continue to make predictions about what a character might do or how the plot might turn. After finishing the book, students can reassess their initial predictions. Good readers understand that they must constantly activate prior knowledge before, during, and after they read. They adjust their expectations and predictions; a book that is completely predictable is not likely to capture anyone's interest. A student about to read *A Wrinkle in Time* for the first time might predict the following:

I know this book is science fiction, so I predict it's going to take place in the future or on some other planet. But the three kids in the cover look pretty average and so does the land below them. The science fiction part is the strange bird-human. Who are those little old ladies down on the ground? The artist wouldn't put them there unless they were important characters in the story.

◆ **Observations:** This activity takes place immediately after reading begins. In a literature response journal, the reader recalls fresh impressions about the characters, setting, and events. Most readers mention details that stand out for them even if they are not sure what their importance is. For example, a reader might list

phrases that describe how a character looks or the feeling a setting evokes. Many readers note certain words, phrases, or passages in a book. Others note the style of an author's writing or the voice in which the story is told. A student just starting to read *A Wrinkle in Time* might write the following:

At the beginning of the story, the atmosphere is sort of scary, with a storm brewing and Meg feeling all alone. Then when Meg goes down to the kitchen and talks with her mother and brother, the atmosphere feels cozy and warm. I can see that Meg gets a lot of comfort from her family.

◆ **Questions:** Point out that good readers don't necessarily understand everything they read. To clarify their uncertainty, they ask questions. Encourage students to identify passages that confuse or trouble them and emphasize that they shouldn't take anything for granted. Share the following student example:

Who exactly is this woman called Mrs. Whatsit? How come she stole sheets? Why is Mrs. Murry so startled by the word tesseract?

◆ **Connections:** Remind students that one story often leads to another. When one friend tells a story, the other friend is often inspired to tell one, too. The same thing often happens when someone reads a book. A character reminds the reader of a relative, or a situation is similar to something that happened to him or her. Sometimes a book makes a reader recall other books or movies. These connections can be helpful in revealing some of the deeper meanings or patterns of a book. The following is an example of a student connection:

Meg seems to feel (and to be) different from most other kids. She feels inferior in some ways. She reminds me a lot of Mafatu in Call It Courage because Mafatu also felt left out, weak, and different.