

Managing Multiple Novels

Amy's thoughts...

Why?

One important thing we can do as language arts teachers is to offer more than one novel to read during a particular theme study. Think about why this is an effective strategy. First, your students will have choice built in. They will be more motivated to read if they have some say in the selection. If they have already read one of the novels, then there will be others for them to choose. If a title has something in it a parent/student finds controversial, he/she has others to select. Second, most of our bookrooms have limited numbers of books. It will be difficult to find 120 copies of a particular title to use. It will be easier to find 30 copies of four different titles. You will be able to select books providing for a wide readability span. Finally, students will be exposed to a lot of quality literature within a short period of time. Although they will be reading one book in its entirety, they will be hearing conversations about the other titles, too. When you plan your next theme, think about offering several book choices instead of just one.

How do I get the students prepared?

It is important to model the expectations for successful literature groups before tackling multiple novels. Consider teaching one class book to demonstrate the roles students will take. Use a fishbowl structure to allow students to “eavesdrop” and analyze the behaviors associated with a successful book discussion.

How to group students?

1. Decide which books you want to use to support your content theme. Ask veteran teachers what their favorite titles are first, and then read them in advance for your own comfort level. Try to pull in various reading levels, too.
2. Book talk your choices to your classes. Point out how they all support the theme. Tell a bit about the plot. Read a passage that leaves students hanging, of course! Gently allude to the readability level. Then give them a paper ballot and promise the students you will try to give them their 1st or 2nd choices.

3. Sort the ballots separating best friends, discipline problems, balancing ability levels, etc. Even out the piles so you have approximately the same size group for each novel. Anyone who doesn't get their 1st or 2nd choice, give them an IOU for their 1st choice on the next literature study.
4. Type up a roster of who is in which group on one handout. Number each student's name. Also record their book number next to each name so tracking lost books and writing fines will be easier. (Eventually you will be jigsawing information by having student #1 in each literature group report together to summarize the part they just completed. That way everyone in the classroom reads one novel and hears about the other three or however many you have chosen. Call this activity Final Four discussions.)

<i>Homecoming</i>	<i>Homesick</i>	<i>Tuck</i>	<i>Triumphant</i>	<i>Literature Selections</i>
Cynthia Voigt	Jean Fritz	Theodore	Taylor	(Holt textbook)

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|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. John Doe | 1. Amy Parker | 1. David Dunn | 1. Nancy Farmer |
| 2. Sally Jones | 2. Beth Arnold | 2. Sue Davis | 2. Jan George |
| 3. Mike Evans | 3. Sam Smith | 3. Greg Joseph | 3. Polly Esther |
| 4. Etc. | 4. Etc. | 4. Etc. | 4. Etc. |
| 5. Etc. | 5. Etc. | 5. Etc. | 5. Etc. |
| 6. Etc. | 6. Etc. | 6. Etc. | 6. Etc. |
| 7. Etc. | 7. Etc. | 7. Etc. | 7. Etc. |
| 8. Etc. | 8. Etc. | 8. Etc. | 8. Etc. |

How to implement?

Decide on how long you want to spend on the reading of the novel (one week, two weeks). Then ask the literature groups to divide their books up into a predetermined number of sections. If you choose to divide the book up into fourths, let students determine how much they will read in each of those four chunks. (Some groups might divide the number of chapters equally. Other groups might decide to read a large chunk first, followed by smaller chunks or vice versa.) Give students a couple of days to independently read the assigned section either through class time or for homework. Have them prepare something written to bring to the discussion group using a written journal or the literature circle role cards. Have other curriculum going on in-between deadlines like a spelling lesson or a writing unit.

Monday

- Distribute novels
- Let students decide how much to read in each section of time
- Model how to complete the open-ended written journal, or model how each of the role cards should be used
- Quiet reading (reading of the section and written work due on Wednesday)

Tuesday

- whole group instruction on another curriculum area like spelling, a writing unit, etc.
- literature groups meet briefly to either continue reading independently or revisit what is supposed to be done for tomorrow's deadline

Wednesday (Literature Circles and Final Four for part 1)

- use roles cards to run the groups or use the written journal as an alternative kind of organizational tool
- think about how you might assess the groups as you wander throughout the classroom eavesdropping (see attached discussion rubric)
- have groups assess their own discussions
- collect role card activity sheets and pass out new ones (don't let students do the same role twice) or collect journals to be read by you overnight and to be returned the next day
- Final Four - have all the #1's, #2's, #3's... from each group meet in each corner of the classroom to retell what is going on in their respective novels so far
- assign the next section to be prepared by Friday

Thursday

- return journals if you are using this alternative so students can complete their homework in time for tomorrow's deadline
- whole group instruction on another curriculum area like spelling, a writing unit, etc.
- literature groups meet briefly to either continue reading independently or revisit what is supposed to be done for tomorrow's deadline

Friday (Literature Circles and Final Four for part 2)

- use roles cards to run the groups or use the written journal as an alternative kind of organizational tool
- think about how you might assess the groups as you wander throughout the classroom eavesdropping (see attached discussion rubric)
- have groups assess their own discussions
- collect role card activity sheets and pass out new ones (don't let students do the same role twice) or collect journals to be read by you overnight and to be returned tomorrow
- Final Four - have all the #1's, #2's, #3's... from each group meet in the corners of the classroom to retell what is going on in their respective novels so far

Continue with this pattern until you are done with the novel study. If you used literature circle role cards on this novel study, consider trying the journal idea on the next. Keep trying variations to keep the interest level high as you approach your multiple novel studies throughout the year.

Are there professional books available?

The Literacy Lending Library has the following two titles that you might find helpful:

- *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine Schlick Noe and Nancy Johnson
- *Literature Circles in Middle School – One Teacher's Journey* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine Schlick Noe, and Janine King