

## INTEGRATING THE COLLINS WRITING PROGRAM AND LITERATURE CIRCLES

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Stella K. Abraham High School is an academically excellent private high school for girls whose goal is to instill critical thinking skills in our students which they can take with them and use throughout their lives. To meet this goal, we create assignments and projects that will stretch our students' abilities to read, assess information and apply new knowledge to the "real world."

This article describes how I adapted the Collins Writing Program (CWP) to Literature Circles, a collaborative learning project I have used for five years. Briefly, Literature Circles are small groups of readers gathering to discuss a piece of literature in-depth that allows individual students to delve more deeply than would be possible in the larger classroom setting. These discussions are especially effective for engaging students in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss and respond to literature. As students collaborate, they are able to exchange ideas with other members of their group and extend their understanding of what they read. Within the group, each student has a specific responsibility commonly referred to as a role. While there are no hard and fast roles, the following are some of the most common:

- discussion director - develops questions for the group to discuss
- passage picker or literary luminary - chooses a selection that the group rereads and discusses because it is interesting, informative, especially well written
- vocabulary enricher - chooses words that are difficult or used in an unfamiliar way
- connector - finds a connection between the story and another book, event in their personal life or the outside world
- illustrator - draws a picture related to the reading
- summarizer - prepares a brief summary of the passage read that day
- travel tracer - tracks the movement when the characters move a lot
- investigator - looks up background information related to the book

The Literature Circles assignment I chose to integrate with the Collins Writing Program was for a unit on Science Fiction and Literature in my tenth grade English classes. In order to incorporate CWP into Literature Circles, I created groups of four or five students

(depending on class enrollment) and chose the roles that would work best for this assignment. Although the Collins Writing Program presents Type Two writing as individual writing assignments, I gave this Type Two as a group assignment. The Type Three was done individually. Also, while the CWP recommends three Focus Correction Areas (FCAs) per assignment, as you will see, I use five or six FCAs since our students were comfortable with more than three FCAs.

I chose the following roles for this assignment:

- The **Discussion Director** (see page 4) develops five questions relevant to the literature being read. The group then discusses those questions, sharing their opinions and reactions. For the assignment covered here, I asked for two questions about theme and two about conflict. I allowed the last question to be open ended.
- The **Passage Master** (see page 5) locates five passages (with page and context) that are surprising or shocking, confusing or controversial, use particularly descriptive language, and/or are significant. The members of the group then re-read the text, think about these passages, and discuss whether or not they agree with the choices.
- In addition to preparing a brief summary of the story that conveys the key points and the main highlights, the **Summarizer** (see page 6) must create an original title for the summary. For this assignment, I required four important events written in complete sentences.
- The **Word Reporter** (see pages 7-9) looks up the definitions of five unknown words and creates an "excellent" sentence using each. An excellent sentence is one that conveys the meaning of the word through content and has correct usage.

After each meeting, a Daily Group Record Sheet (see page 10) is filled out by the Discussion Director who also acts as the group leader. The Group Record Sheet is used to record the two topics which generated the most discussion and the level of each member's participation (beginning, developing, focused, exemplary). This sheet is not graded but allows me to gauge the progress in each day's discussion. In order to incorporate the CWP into Literature Circles, I assigned each group of four or five students a different Ray Bradbury short story since the theme of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade Literature Circles project is science fiction, and nobody does it better than Bradbury. I wanted to have two different forms of assessment so I divided the project into two parts: one as a Type Two and one as a Type Three.

As the group meetings proceeded, students were encouraged to take notes on each member's presentation so they would be equipped to write the Type Three portion of the assignment which was to be done individually (see page 10).

Incorporating a Type Two into this project allowed for student discussion and it was gratifying to hear students say, "I can only find four words that seem unusual or unfamiliar. I need help finding another one" and hearing another student in the group saying, "No problem. I never heard of the word \_\_\_\_\_ before. You can use it if you want to." One day, while working collaboratively, a student asked me if I could look over her summary of the story. I suggested that she open the question to her group. After she looked at me like I was crazy and after she asked me again (I guess she thought that I hadn't heard her), she actually did what I'd suggested. When she finished going over her summary with her group, she broke into a big smile because they told her it was "great!"

Two things came out of this endeavor: My students now appreciate the value of owning their work and the satisfaction that comes with being responsible for their own learning. They have also stopped groaning when I say, "Take out a piece of paper. This is Type Two writing," or when I hand out a Type Three writing assignment. In fact, the first question students ask when they're assigned Type Three writing is, "What are the FCAs?"

My students learned to trust themselves and their classmates. They learned that it's okay to ask questions and that they have interesting ideas, and they learned to be less dependent on me, their teacher. In addition, students were far more engaged than is typical in a larger classroom setting and, as a result, they came away feeling more productive and satisfied. Finally, students demonstrated an increased level of involvement in full class discussions that took place after this assignment was completed. Those students who had hesitated previously now participated more readily.

Integrating Literature Circles with the Collins Writing Program provided a basis for grading students on their ability to work collaboratively as well as independently with clear goals and assessment standards.

## TYPE TWO: DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Your job is to develop five questions relevant to this story that your group can discuss. Your questions should require thought and get everyone talking and sharing their opinions and reactions. Two questions must be about the theme of the story and two must be about a conflict in the story. The last question can be about anything you choose. Each question is worth 20 points.

Order for Leading Your Group Discussion:

1. Call on the Summarizer to read the summary.
2. Pose each one of your questions to your group for discussion.
3. Ask for each member of your group to state comment(s)/question(s) about this story. Lead your group in response to what each person says.
4. Call on the Passage Master.
5. Call on the Vocabulary Reporter.
6. Fill out the Group Record sheet, with input from your group members.

Types of Questions:

1. What did you think about \_\_\_\_\_? (name a specific event, action, or character's action)
2. Why do you think that \_\_\_\_\_?
3. What do you think will happen \_\_\_\_\_? (ask for predictions of events and characters' actions)
4. What is happening at the part where \_\_\_\_\_?
5. What do you think \_\_\_\_\_ (event/incident) means?

## TYPE TWO: PASSAGE MASTER

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Locate five passages (with page and context) that your group should reread, discuss, and think about. These passages should be important things for everyone to notice, remember, or think about. Choose a variety of passages. Look for passages that are surprising or shocking, confusing or controversial, use descriptive writing, and/or are significant (20 points each).

During Your Group Meeting, do the Following:

1. Make sure everyone opens to the correct page and help them find where the passage begins.
2. Either read it out loud yourself, have everyone read it silently, or ask someone to read it.
3. Tell your reasons for selecting each passage; ask for comments. Do they agree with your choices?

PASSAGE	PAGE	¶	CONTEXT

## TYPE TWO: SUMMARIZER

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Your job is to prepare a brief summary of the story. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give a summary that conveys the key points, the main highlights of the story. You must mention four important events in the story and you must write them in complete sentences (25 points each).

My title for the summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:

\_\_\_\_\_ My group agreed that my summary was complete and accurate (if not, add what is missing on the back of this sheet).

**TYPE TWO: WORD REPORTER**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Your job is to look up the definitions of five unknown words in your story and create an excellent sentence using each word (20 points each).

During the Lit Circle Meeting, Do the Following:

Make sure everyone in your group copies down each word and definition on the vocabulary sheet. Together create a new sentence and write this sentence on your vocabulary sheet.

1. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence from the book:

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The definition is:

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My excellent sentence is:

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2. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence from the book:

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The definition is:

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My excellent sentence is:

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3. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence from the book:

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The definition is:

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My excellent sentence is:

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4. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence from the book:

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The definition is:

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My excellent sentence is:

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5. Word: \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph \_\_\_\_\_

Sentence from the book:

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The definition is:

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My excellent sentence is:

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## DAILY GROUP RECORD SHEET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Short Story: \_\_\_\_\_

Following the group meeting, the Discussion Director will complete this form with the help of the group members.

1. Two topics which generated the most discussion today were:

2. Group Participation Today:

(1) Beginning, (2) Developing, (3) Focused, (4) Exemplary

Member's Name	Completed Reading	Contributed relevant info	Listened to group members	Fulfilled duties

Remember to give this sheet to the teacher before leaving each day.

## TYPE THREE: INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT

Each member of the group will choose any two of the following:

1. Develop a 5-7 sentence paragraph that answers two questions proposed by the Discussion Director.

### FOCUS CORRECTION AREAS:

- include 1 question and answer about theme (marked with a "T") - 10 points
- include 1 question and answer about conflict (marked with a "C") - 10 points
- include 1 example to support each question (marked with an "E") - 10 points
- include 1 literary term (underlined) in each question or answer - 10 points
- consistent tense throughout - 5 points
- include 2 words (circled) found by the Word Reporter - 5 points

2. Develop a 5-7 sentence paragraph that describes the significance of one of the passages found by the Passage Master:

### FOCUS CORRECTION AREAS:

- thorough explanation of the significance of the passage - 15 points
- include 2 literary terms (underlined) - 10 points
- connect the passage to a personal experience (marked with a "P") - 10 points
- include 1 short sentence (highlighted in pink), 2 compound sentences (highlighted in yellow), and 2 complex sentences (highlighted in blue) - 10 points
- 1 word (circled) found by the Word Reporter - 5 points

3. Develop a paragraph of 5-7 sentences that discusses the theme of the story:

### FOCUS CORRECTION AREAS:

- statement of theme (marked with a "T") - 5 points
- include 3 examples to support theme (each marked with an "E") - 15 points
- at least 1 sentence that includes the correct use of the semicolon (underline the sentence) - 5 points
- embed 2 literary terms in your paragraph and explain how they are effectively used (mark each literary term with an "L") - 20 points
- include 1 word (circled) found by the Word Reporter - 5 points