



Teaching Those ‘Grand Conversations’

Teachers often ask: How DO we help all students enthusiastically engage in ‘grand conversations’ in literature circle discussions? This is a question I like to ponder, since the conversations we have about the books we are reading are the heart and soul of literature circles. Being explicit about expectations counts! Here are the expectations that I share with my students.

- 1) **Be prepared.** Come to the group prepared. This means choosing a passage beforehand that you wish to share and being prepared to explain your choice.
- 2) **Listen thoughtfully.** As another student shares his or her passage, listen and think about how to respond to the passage: what connections can you make, what questions do you have, how does this quote make you feel, what picture do you get in your mind as you hear this reading?
- 3) **Think deeply.** The conversations should result in a better understanding of the book. After talking with others, you should be able to think about the story in different ways.
- 4) **Everyone is included.** Each of you will have a chance to respond before any student has a second turn. (At first, this may be seen as contrived turn-taking, but soon students move into a more natural conversation, inviting in the quieter students, and individually considering how much they are talking.)

In Stacey Wyatt’s grade 5/6 class, she invites the students, in groups, to generate criteria for what makes a powerful literature circle discussion. Then, as a class, students categorize the criteria. Stacey and her students call this their “Oral Literature Circle Response.” The students understand the criteria, having co-created it, and their performances steadily improve, because they are all practicing toward explicit behaviours. They use the feedback sheet to monitor and support their discussions. Periodically, each student reflects on his/her performance in the discussions and sets a goal for the next time.

ORAL LITERATURE CIRCLE RESPONSE

Criteria	Comments/Feedback
BEING PREPARED <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has novel (and backup plan)• Powerful Passage (P.P.) marked in book• Assignment complete• TDT (tease, don’t tell)• Make sure you read to decided chapter	
SHARING YOUR POWERFUL PASSAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eye contact• Speak loudly/clearly• Share something meaningful• Explain thinking in detail• Explain why you chose it• Explain any connections	
RESPONDING TO OTHERS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen respectfully• Look at speaker• Sit in a circle• Share and discuss opinions• Ask questions• Okay to agree/disagree (but support your thinking with evidence from book)	

Thanks, Stacy, for sharing with us!

If you have extensions or applications of your work with *Grand Conversations*, *Thoughtful Responses*, please share them – with your colleagues and with me! Together, we are always better.