

Paterson, P.O. (2000). The role of text in peer-led literature circles in the secondary classroom. In T. Shanahan & F.V. Rodriguez-Brown (Eds.), *Forty-ninth yearbook of the National Reading Conference* (pp. 235-251). Chicago: National Reading Conference.

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Summary: This is a study of the literature discussions of a class of Advanced Placement, 10th grade Honors World Literature students as they read and discussed Kafka's (1915/1981) *The Metamorphosis*. In particular, the author studied the role of the text in peer-led discussions. Students read the book over a three-day period and discussed each chapter with little or no teacher involvement. Literature discussions were taped and transcribed, and the students wrote essays about the book. An analysis was done by grouping and categorizing individual and group comments. These students relied heavily on the text as they questioned the text and used it as an authority for answering questions.

Assumptions:

- Rosenblatt's theory of reader response speaks to the necessity of taking the text into consideration when making interpretations.
- Students deal with literature within the contexts of shared cultural values, genre knowledge, intentions, and needs of both reader and writer, and expectations about particular texts; thus, meaning in written texts is shaped by cultural and classroom constraints of rhetorical communities.
- Peer-led literature circles represent an accessible structure for examining reading strategies, especially students' approaches to text.
- Few studies have looked at the role of the text in reader response theory.

Results:

- Students relied heavily on the text in the group discussion.
- They retold the literal facts of the story; their retelling frequently led to interpretation as the details of the text gained significance.
- Students changed stances and processes as they progressed through the novel. In particular, they tended to ask fewer questions as the days wore on.
- Student analysis of the text hinged largely on the nature and quality of the questions asked. In general, they asked factual questions and meaning questions.
- Students used the text as an authority when debates occurred. Four variations of this emerged: Text Proves a Point, Omission Allows a Point, Text Fails to Prove a Point, and Text Disproves a Point.
- Students noticed conflicting or unusual elements in the text, which frequently became clues to meaning.
- Students became aware of the author of the book and examined his motives and purposes.

Conclusions:

- Proficient secondary students took the authority of the text seriously and used it extensively in the process of active, engaged reading.

- Peer-led discussion groups provided a forum in which students could initiate and sustain their own analyses of literature and hone their interpretive skills.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Literature discussions provide a way for students to address the text according to learned literary interpretations.
- Teachers should examine their techniques and strategies closely to see if their approach is one that balances the legitimacy of both the text and the reader.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Support teachers' continued professional development in using text-based discussion.