

Reader-Response Theory in Literature Circles

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: THEORY AND
OBSERVATIONS

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Wolfgang Iser and an author's "implied reader"

The four elements that go into creating an authoritative reading are 1) the linguistic element, 2) the cultural and historical context, 3) the genre expectations and stylistics pertinent to a text, and 4) the author's implied reader. Students will need help from an experienced guide with the first three aspects of reading a text, **but it is incumbent upon them to fulfill the role of the author's implied or ideal reader. This is a process.**

Stanley Fish: Interpretive Communities

Stanley Fish: Locates meaning of literary texts in the protocols of interpretive communities to which readers belong.

“The ability to interpret is not acquired; it is constitutive of being human” What is learned are ways of interpreting.

Reading theories (New Criticism, Liberal Humanism, etc) are the result of interpretation styles, not the other way around.

Literature as Transitional Space: D. W. Winnicott

1. Literary reading:
an opportunity for developing greater satisfaction in the relationship between self and world,; for him it is a psychodynamic process
2. Literature brings readers into the world and the world into readers, thereby allowing for social and cultural activity while preserving individuality.
3. The False Self: Teacher-centered instruction without student collaboration or input of any kinds fosters a deadened state of student compliance and leads to over-reliance on a student's "schooling" background rather than on models of freedom based on ever-evolving cultural traditions.
4. A person's true self is created in the middle state between psyche and world suggests "an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute" (Winnicott 2).

What are lit circles?



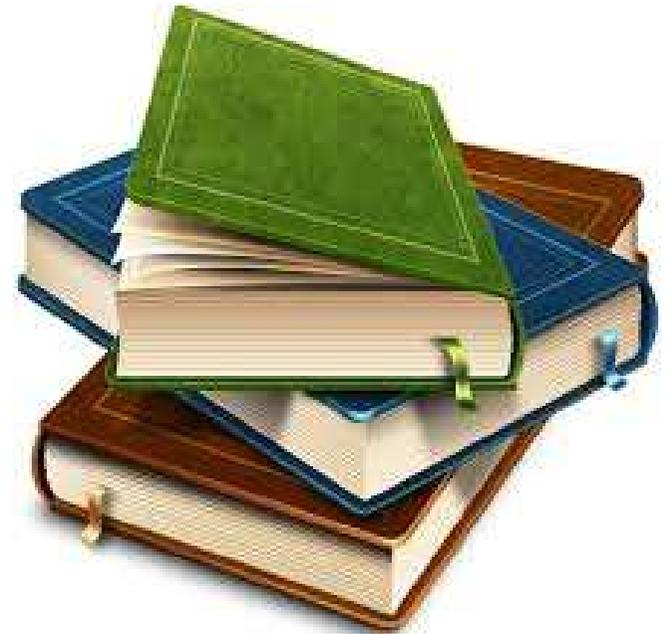
Literature circles are small student reading groups which have a specific framework for allowing students to have real, meaningful discussions about literature in English.

Features of Literature circles

1. Collaborative learning
2. Independent reading
3. Student-centered inquiry
4. Teachers as facilitators

Creative Brainstorming: Roles

- ❖ Discussion Director
- ❖ Culture Collector
- ❖ Summarizer
- ❖ Connector
- ❖ Word Master



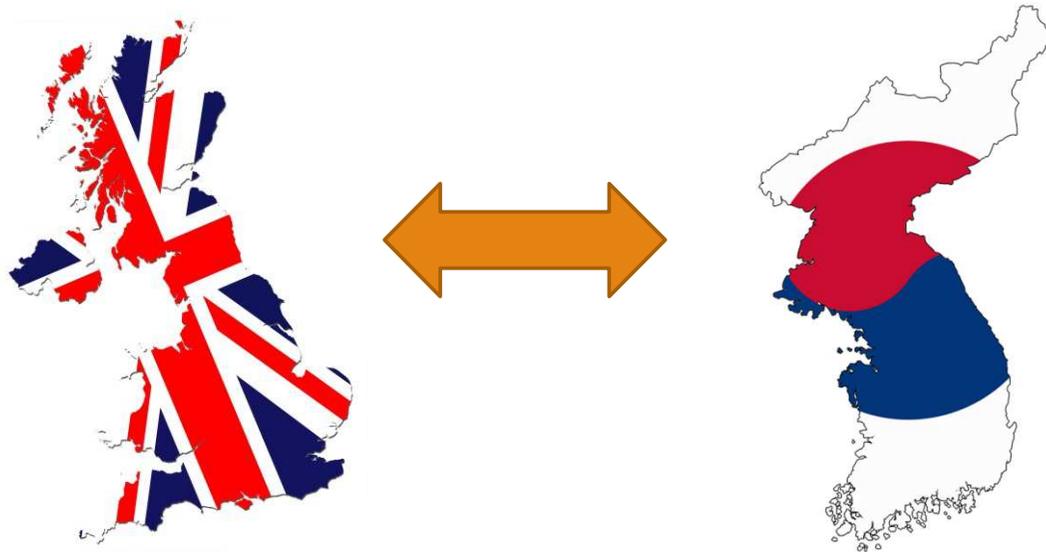
DISCUSSION DIRECTOR:

Each time a course reading is assigned, students take roles. The discussion director's role is to develop questions for group members to answer.



Culture Collector

The Culture Collector's job is to look at the story and note both differences and similarities between the culture represented in the story and their own culture. For example, as a Collector, you might think about the theme of the story and talk about whether or not this theme is important in your own culture

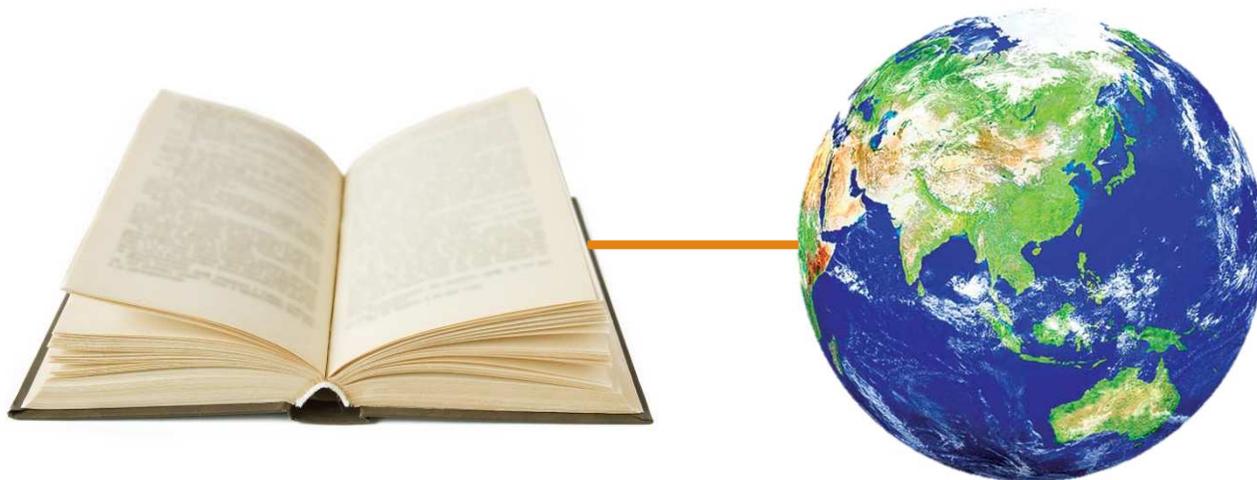


Summarizer

The summarizer gives a brief, but complete, summary of the poem or plot of the story. The summary should be "a one or two minute summary," but most often people take at least twice that long to read their summaries in the first few literature circle cycles. The idea here is for the Summarizer to understand that they are not to copy too much from the text; **rather, the Summarizer needs to retell the story or poem in her own words.**

Personal Connector

The Connector's role is to try to find connections between the text and the real world. For example, the Connector may make connections between the thoughts, feelings or actions of characters in the story or poem and his or her own experiences.



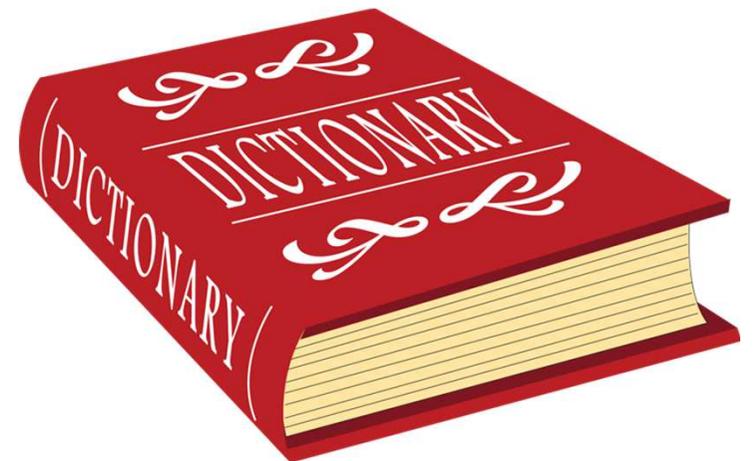
Word Master

The Word Master may choose words which he or she believes to be the most important words found in a story or poem.

He or she may ask the group why a particular word is repeated six times in a story.

In a poem, he or she may identify the key word in a poem.

This is a good role for less social or less motivated students.



Passage Person (optional)

The passage person identifies significant paragraphs and sections.

The Passage Person may also be asked to look for literary language, such as metaphors and irony, once they have been taught in class.



Group Projects

Plot Diagram for "Desiree's Baby" by Kate Chopin

9. _____

8. _____

7. _____

6. _____

5. _____

4. _____

3. _____

2. _____

1. _____

Rising Action ←

Exposition

Protagonist:

Antagonist:

Foil:

Setting – Time:

Setting – Place:

Conflict:

Name _____

Climax:

Falling Action →

Resolution:

Author's Theme:

Symbolism:

Foreshadowing:

Irony:

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

Crucial criteria in the selection of texts.

1. The text has universal appeal.
2. **Surface Simplicity**
3. Potential depth
4. Contemporary language
5. Brevity

Expected results:

1. The lowest levels of understanding entail the ability to answer literal questions and retell information acquired from text.
2. At the midlevel, the reader merges the new information with his or her pre-existing knowledge and skills and makes connections. Harvey and Daniels call this “real understanding.” This leads to the acquiring of deep understanding and the active use of new insights.

A few observations....

How do Korean
students approach
English- language
literature?

Observations....

Korean students tend to be comfortable analyzing literature using “flow charts.” Typically they are less comfortable with open texts with open-ended readings.

Celtic Culture and Myth

Druid

Warrior

Wizard

Knight

**King Arthur
legend**

Harry Potter

The Lord
of the Rings

It is originally a group of Celtic culture

It was transformed in Christian culture
after the Roman occupation of Celtic.

It was transformed into romance literature
in the Middle Ages.

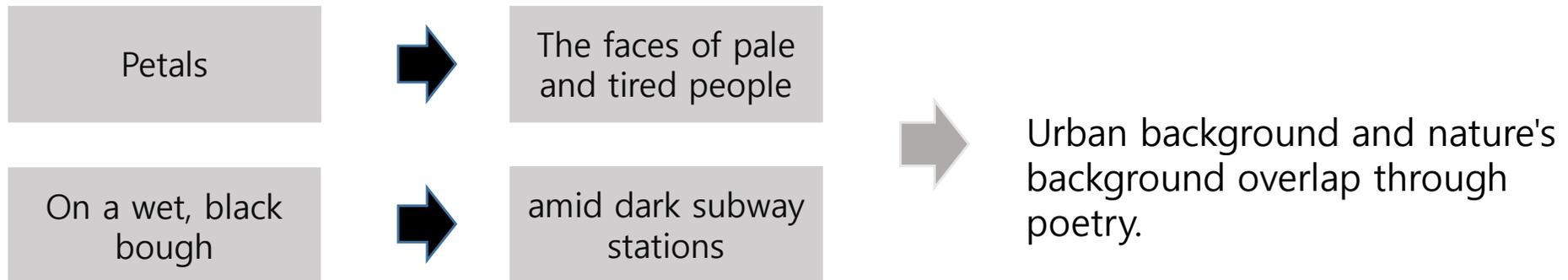
Various fantasy works were created from the legend
King Arthur legend that had a strong Christian color
since the Roman period.

In a station of the metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.



- apparition: ghost
- petal: flower
- bough: tree



(generalized) Observations continued

How do international students differ in their approach to literature?



International Students

International students are more comfortable focusing on gender, **power dynamics**, race, decolonizing rhetoric, Black rhetoric, LatinX rhetoric, “toxic masculinity,” etc.

--averse to structuralist readings.



“Woke” Discourse as an Interpretive Style

Woke: At its core is an honest and good-faith effort to grapple with the legacies of racism, sexism and homophobia.

Problematize

My pronouns

heteronormativity

Cisgender

Intersectionality

White Privilege

Non-binary

Woke Discourse

Performing the discourse by canceling and shaming becomes a way of establishing your status and power as an enlightened person. It becomes a way of showing that you really belong. It also becomes a way of showing the world that you are anti-elite, even though you work, study and live in circles that are extremely elite. (David Brooks, *Nytimes*)

Goals and Conclusions

- ◆ My primary purpose for using literature circles is to promote a personal approach to reading literature through close readings of texts. A second, more practical goal is to facilitate using literature to improve students' English reading, writing, and speaking skills.
- ◆ The “implied reader” did not emerge
- ◆ Interpretive Communities *Rule* reader response
- ◆ Immersive reading should be followed by critical readings.



Thank you