Suggestions for Effective Literature Discussions

1. Literature Circles should contain 3-5 members. When you have larger groups some students take the role of observer rather than participant.

2. Discussions should last approximately 15-20 minutes.

3. Students should meet 2-3 times over each month to discuss their book.

4. Groups work best when all students are keeping up with the novel. However, it is not wise to limit the number of pages students can read. Never discourage students from reading ahead.

5. Tape recording the group discussion does encourage more attention to the task and more effort on students’ part to maintain rich discussions.

6. Students should review effective strategies for rich discussion prior to the first group session. (See Guidelines for Effective Literature Discussion, page 2)

7. Students should regularly complete a self-evaluation of their group work and set goals for improvement. (See Student Self-Evaluation of Literature Discussion)

8. Providing students with set questions they must cover, often stifles originality and free flow of ideas. Students need direction and modeling in the beginning of a semester but experience has shown that they can develop richer, higher quality discussions with more freedom to set their own direction and discuss what is important to this particular group at this time.

9. Groups work tends to include richer discussion and debate when the group is diverse in age, gender and ethnicity. It is valuable for all students to hear the opinions of others who are different from themselves. If all the students are reading the same book, it is suggested that the instructor divide the students into heterogeneous groups.

Guidelines for Effective Literature Discussion

1. **Active Participation of all Group Members** - All members should stay engaged, and make efforts to participate in discussions. Everyone’s voice should be heard. Make the effort to jump into the conversation. Take risks to speak up.

2. **Piggyback off of Other People’s ideas** - Try to connect with what other people are saying, look for relationships between ideas, think about similarities and differences in views.

3. **Support Opinions with Evidence** - Be prepared to support your ideas with facts and/or examples. Explain why you have a certain point of view.

4. **Disagree Constructively and Respectfully** - Be polite, don’t get angry or upset, remember people have a right to their opinions. Develop a relationship where you feel comfortable sharing opposing viewpoints. Value diversity in responses.

5. **Stay Focused on the Discussion** - Remember the objectives of the literature circle, stay on task. Take the initiative to pull the group back on topic if needed.

6. **Ask Questions for Clarification** - Direct questions at speakers in a polite manner when you don’t understand what has been said. Ask people to explain or elaborate, or make reference to an example from the book if it will help to clarify things.

7. **Be an Active Listener and Take Turns Speaking** - Listen and provide eye contact when others are speaking. Don’t interrupt even when you have something important to say. Respect other people’s right to be heard.

8. **Encourage Others to Speak Up, But Don’t Pressure Group Members** - Learn how to draw others into the conversation in a non-threatening way. Prompt people to participate, ask probing questions but don’t force people to speak.

9. **Respond to Each Other, Not the Teacher** - The Instructor will be a co-participant in a group but he/she will not be a group leader. Don’t wait for the teacher to start the group or direct the conversation. You are in charge.

10. **Be Prepared for the Literature Discussion** - Read the designated pages so you are prepared to discuss things. Review the section you have read before class so you are well prepared. Use post-it notes or index cards as a note-taking system so you can organize your ideas and provide input and support for your thinking.