

Mapping Mini-Lessons

Every class is different; thus, I have to tailor my mini-lessons to their needs. Some groups are overpopulated with talkers who hog all the airtime and need training in getting equal talk-time for all members of the group. Others have trouble sustaining more than a two-minute discussion and need training—sometimes intense—in asking follow-up questions and “piggybacking” on others’ comments. Still others have trouble staying on task and seem to meander away from the book to their Friday night plans. These meanderers require training in how to stick to the agenda and how to take it back to the book.

Whatever the chemistry of the group and the class, Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke seem to have nailed the common trouble spots and offered sensible, easy-to-implement lessons for equipping students with the skills they need to be successful in literature circles. The chart below shows how, for two literature circle rounds (four meetings with each book), I used Daniels’ and Steineke’s book, *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles*, to map out my mini-lessons. Sometimes I have to modify to meet the needs of a particular group, but I always try to keep a balance among the three strands: cognitive strategies, literary lenses, and social skills.

I coordinate the literary lessons with the skills and strategies (as defined by the ELA Arkansas frameworks) I’m focusing on in a given unit or quarter. For example, if I’m teaching theme, I focus my mini-lessons on this skill so that I can model (often using children’s books, especially for teaching theme) analyzing theme, have students undertake guided reading for practice, and then, they can use their literature circle book for independent reading practice. I require them to make entries about theme in their Reading Response Journals, noting text details that point to a theme. Finally, they write a Polished Response on the theme of the book.

Literature Circle Mini-Lessons			
L.C. #	Topic	Type	Activities/Notes
1	Home Court Advantage p.43	Social Skills	
2	Defining Discussion Skills p. 48	Cognitive Strategies	
3	Asking Follow-Up Questions p. 133	Cognitive Strategies	
4	Getting More Mileage Out of Drawings p. 154	Cognitive Strategies	
5	Prove It! Taking it Back to the Book p. 143	Cognitive Strategies	
6	The Envelope: Predicting Plot and Character p. 206	Literary Lenses	
7	Save the Last Word for Me p. 138	Cognitive Strategies	
8	Taking Note Of Strong Verbs p. 193	Literary Lenses	

Resources: Daniels, Harvey & Steineke, Nancy. *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.