Teacher's Guide

TEACH CREECH!

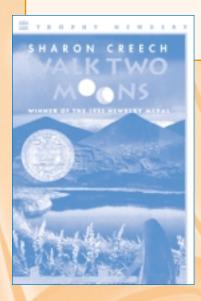
USING LITERATURE CIRCLES

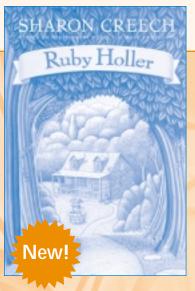
Make the novels of Newbery Medal-winning author Sharon Creech come alive in the classroom!

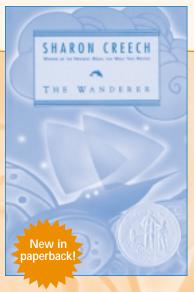
Literature Circles are small discussion groups comprised of 4 to 5 students, each of whom has a specific role and function. Literature Circles can be used in one of two ways: (1) each group reads a different book or (2) the entire class reads the same book. This student-centered instructional technique enables each student to participate regardless of his or her reading level.

Assessment in Literature Circles can be both formal and informal and determined with student input. The students lead discussions in their small groups and the teacher acts as mediator and facilitator.

This teacher's guide illustrates how to set up Literature Circles and use them to teach the novels of Sharon Creech.

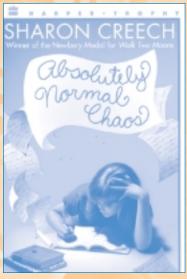


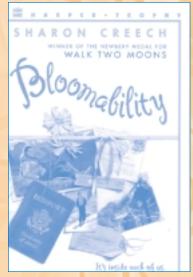


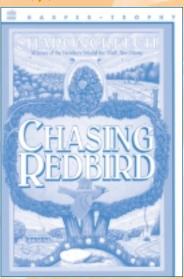












Teach Creech! Model Lesson

In order for Literature Circles to be successful, it is important that the process be modeled for the students. Begin by reading *Pleasing the Ghost* out loud to the class and working through the process of Literature Circles as one large group.

Since *Pleasing the Ghost* is written for a younger audience, older students will be able to grasp the thematic ideas, character traits, and writing style more readily. Because Creech's novels possess similarities in theme, character traits, and writing style, students will be able to apply the concept of Literature Circles to any of her novels.

Follow these steps:

- **1.** Before reading the book, explain each individual role (Director, Passage Detective, Researcher, Connector, and Vocabulary Enricher—see definitions below) and assign one to each student.
- 2. Group the students according to their assigned roles (all directors together, etc.) and have them brainstorm ways to accomplish their assigned task.
- 3. Read Pleasing the Ghost to the class, occasionally stopping to point out passages, words, or questions that might be helpful to the circles.
- 4. Work with each group to accomplish their assigned task.

The Director focuses the discussion on the big ideas of the reading. It is important for the Director to ask open-ended questions that will allow for discussion. These questions should be written and brought to the group session. With some modification, these questions could be the same for any novel discussed.

For example:

- What are the two important ideas presented in *Pleasing the Ghost*?
- Did the reading remind you of any real-life experiences?
- What emotions did you feel while reading?
- What, if anything, surprised you in the reading?
- Can someone briefly summarize the reading?
- How does Dennis show integrity? Honesty? Courage?
- What do Dennis and Billy have in common and why is it important?

The Passage Detective focuses the group on specific passages in the reading that might foreshadow an event, reveal something about a character, evoke strong emotion, paint word pictures with imagery, or is e specially well written or thought provoking. As the student reads or listens, they need to look for passages they can bring to the group sessions. Have students discuss the implications of these passages to the book as a whole.

For example:

"The ghosts had never hurt me, but still I was afraid. What if it was a wicked, horrible ghost? But I also wanted to know who it would be. Maybe it would be the one ghost I wanted, the one ghost I prayed for, the one ghost I'd sent for." (page 5)

"Bo barked, and at first I thought he was barking at Uncle Arvie's flying. Then I realized he was barking at someone else. Billy Baker was riding toward me on his bike." (page 51)



The Researcher supplies author information and provides historical or cultural information about the reading to lend in better understanding to the group members. This is not indepth research, just new ideas and information to be shared informally.

For example:

Students reading *Pleasing the Ghost* might research the effects of the death of a parent on the children left behind, paranormal occurrences, what makes a bully a bully, and/or the possible effects of a stroke.

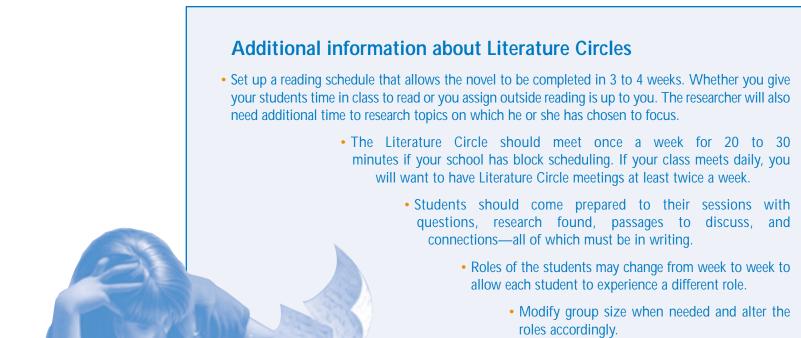
The Connector makes connections between the book and the world outside of literature using other novels, short stories, poem, movies, television shows, news, and/or songs. These connections set prior knowledge and help bring the reality of the 21st century to the novel.

For example:

Movies: Ghostbusters, Casper, Beetlejuice Books: Ruby Holler, A Christmas Carol

TV Show: Charmed

The Vocabulary Enricher finds new words or special words that are important to the text. Note the page and paragraph number, and then define the word. **Note:** This is an optional role if it is necessary to have five students in a group. After students have discussed this novel within their "role" groups, make Literature Circles with one student from each role and allow them to discuss *Pleasing the Ghost*, making the necessary connections. Each group will then report orally to the class on their findings about theme, characters, and style.



Teach Creech! Using Literature Circles

After completing the model lesson, each student will understand the expectations of his/her role and is now ready to be a part of a Literature Circle. Assign students roles and set up each Literature Circle with four or five students, one student per role in each circle. Then assign each circle one of the following novels written by Sharon Creech: *Bloomability, Chasing Redbird, Walk Two Moons, The Wanderer, Absolutely Normal Chaos,* and *Ruby Holler*.

In addition to the questions outlined during the model lesson, ask students to determine how the following ideas apply to the novel and to focus on the following in their discussions:

Themes: loss/abandonment, family relationships, self-discovery, friendship

Characters: honesty, open-mindedness, courage

Writing Style: story within a story, literary allusions, imagery

As each group reads, they should find support for the above as well as look for other major ideas and character traits. As stated earlier, because of the similarities in theme, character, and style, students will be able to discuss these in general, and then relate them to any one of the books.

Group Sharing

The activities listed below all require use of higher order thinking skills. Groups could choose one or more of these options or suggest another idea for group sharing:

- Make a collage which might be found hanging in the bedroom of one of the characters and write a brief explanation of each item selected.
- Write diary entries that one of the characters might have written during the course of the story.
- Write a poem or song that expresses one or more of the characters' feelings.
- Create a piece of original artwork that interprets one of the themes of the book.
- Write and perform an original skit based on the book.
- Write letters that two of the characters might have written to one another about what was happening in their lives.
- Create an original board game based on the book.
- Write and record an original news broadcast about the events in the book.
- Write and illustrate a picture book based on the characters and events.
- Cast the characters in a movie based on the book and develop an advertising campaign for the movie.
- Draw a timeline of the book, complete with illustrations and commentaries about each event on the timeline.
- Create a cause-and-effect continuum of how and why the main character changes as a result of the events and situations that occur.

After the projects are completed, each group will share their final product with the class.

Assessment

Informal: Students should bring their written assignments to each session. These will include the Director's questions, the passages chosen by the Passage Director, the information found by the Researcher, and the connections discovered by the Connector. As the teacher visits with each Literature Circle, he or she can check these, and each Circle should hand in the assignment along with a written report for each session. The reports can be given back to the Circle at the next session.

Formal: Students should have input on how their final product should be evaluated and this should be determined prior to the completion of the assignment. The quality of the product as well as the presentation of the product should be taken into consideration.

Activities Across the Curriculum

Language Arts

In *The Wanderer*, Sophie and Cody write about each other from their own points of view. Have students chose a secondary character in one of the novels and write an internal and external description of the protagonist. For example, students may choose to have Carl Ray write about Mary Lou.

Sharon Creech uses literary allusions in her books to help create context for the reader and to help the reader gain insight into the character or situation. For example, in *Absolutely Normal Chaos*, Mary Lou reads about the life journey of Odysseus while she is on her own journey of self-discovery. Have students find a poem or story to help illustrate an event that happened in their lives. Then have them write about that event making reference to the poem or story.

Social Studies

The main characters in five of these seven books all have a connection to Bybanks, Kentucky, "a green spot alongside the Ohio River." (*Walk Two Moons*, page 1) Although Bybanks is a fictional place, have students locate Kentucky and the Ohio River on a map of the United States. Then ask them to keep notes on the geographic locations mentioned in the novels as they read and to locate these as well, such as West Virginia in *Absolutely Normal Chaos*. Students may want to plot out the route Sal traveled with her grandparents, color a map with the many places Dinnie and her family lived, or trace the route taken by Sophie to England.

Science

Sophie's ship, *The Wanderer*, is caught in a storm at sea and uncle Dock says, "We're in a force-ten gale with winds at fifty knots an hour and waves like walls of water pounding us day and night, and still we have no sails up." (page 201) So how did *The Wanderer* survive? Have students research storms at sea and the nautical terms Uncle Dock uses. They should write their report like a ship's log, explaining what happened and why.

In Walk Two Moons, Sal's Gram says that she's waited her entire life to see Old Faithful, the famous geyser in Yellowstone National Park. She says it looks like "a whole river of water...shooting straight up in the air." (page 224) Have students research the science of geysers like Old Faithful. What causes the water to shoot up? What makes Old Faithful?

Geography

Have students draw a map or a route they would like to follow—either across the country (like Sal), near home (like Zinny or Dallas and Florida), in another country (like Dinnie), or across the ocean (like Sophie). Have them include pictures of places they would like to visit.

There are a lot of descriptions of a holler in *Ruby Holler*. Have a class discussion about what a holler is and in what part of the country they might be found. Ask students if they'd like to live in a holler; why or why not?

Math

Have students estimate the total mileage of the route Sal or Dinnie travels and have them trace the route on a map. Have students perform the same exercise for Sophie's journey, except have them find out the exact distance of a nautical mile vs. a statute mile. Present the following word problem: If *The Wanderer* was travelling at 20 knots, how many miles per hour is that? (1 knot = 1.15 mph)

Health

Many of the secondary characters in the novels suffer from sicknesses that lead to their deaths; Mr. Furtz has heart trouble, Dennis's Uncle Arvie and Sal's Gram both have strokes, Rose dies from a childhood disease. Have students chose one character and research the prevention and treatment of the medical problems this character faces; then write a script for an episode of a television drama.



About the Author

It has been said that a reader can get acquainted with authors just by reading the words they write. This is especially true of Sharon Creech who chooses to share so much of herself and her heart in her novels. She is honest and forthright in interviews about her work, the inspiration behind her work, and the real-life events that have found their way into the pages of her novels. The best way to make Sharon Creech alive and real to the students who love her books is to share some of her personal insights with them.

When asked about her childhood and the impact her family has had on her writing she states, "I grew up in a big, noisy family in a Cleveland suburb, with hordes of relatives telling stories around the kitchen table. Here I learned to exaggerate and embellish, because if you didn't, your story was drowned out by someone else's more exciting one." She also read many books, spending hours at the library. She is quoted, "I don't remember the titles of the books I read as a child, but I do remember the experience of reading—of drifting into the pages and living in someone else's world, the excitement of never knowing what lay ahead."

As a child Creech loved to walk in the woods and climb trees until "you could reach a place where there was only you and the tree and the birds and the sky." When she learned that one of her ancestors was a Native American she would exaggerate and tell people she was full-blooded Indian. She often imagined herself as Estsanatlehi, a mythical figure that never dies, living from a baby to an old woman then becoming a baby again.

When asked to relate a funny story about her sixth-grade year, she told this story: "Our class was going to put on a presentation for our parents and my teacher assigned me a big part to learn. I was excited, but I did not realize that my brain would not memorize lines. I just could not do it. I was the opening speaker and on the night of the presentation, I stood up and said my first line. Then I repeated the first line. And then I repeated it again and again and again, like a stuck record. I could not remember what came next. Finally, my teacher waved me off the stage. I was mortified then, but it seems quite funny to me now."

"This reminds me of Dinnie in *Bloomability*, when she is trying to learn Italian and just can't get it. Yet she forges ahead. It also reminds me of Sophie in *The Wanderer*, when she is trying to prove herself on board the boat, and even Jack in *Love That Dog*, who doesn't get poetry at first. Most of my characters bumble along in some area and feel at times less than capable, and yet they have a certain sort of stubborn determination, and the way they tell about these failings is often humorous."

Creech shared some events that happened to her in real life that have ended up on the pages of her novels and in the hearts of her readers. "It is difficult to separate fact from fiction now, but much of what happens to Mary Lou happened to me. For example, the arrival of a country cousin, the bumbled kiss in a field, and the bedsprings crashing down the attic steps. Also, I took the same trip Salamanca takes in *Walk Two Moons*, though no one died on the trip, and I lived in Switzerland like Dinnie in *Bloomability*. I was even a champion 'downfeller' at skiing like Dinnie was. Like Jack in *Love That Dog*,



I really, really, really did not get the wheelbarrow poem. But more than the specific events, what I draw on is the 'real' sense of places I have been and the kind of atmosphere generated by those places and the people I have met."

Creech usually begins her stories "with the image of a character and a setting" (a girl on a sailboat, for example), and then she lets "the character talk in order to hear her voice. The voice gives many clues about what she values, what she cares about, her worries and her fears. Place also shapes character, and both the voice and the place gets me started. Then I trust that a story will emerge. Words generate more words; thoughts generate more thoughts."

There is a piece of Sharon Creech in every book she writes. Creech's daughter, Karin, took the same trip as Sophie does in *The Wanderer*. Although they followed the same route and encountered

a storm, Sophie developed a personality all her own. Creech tapped her daughter for lots of information, took a sailing course, and read lots of sailing books to gain knowledge and background. The first two Bompie stories that Sophie tells are Creech's father's stories, but the rest are imagined.

Creech attributes the strong female protagonists in her novels to her mother and all of the women teachers she had who were strong and smart. Because of their influence, Creech never saw girls as weak, help-less, or brainless.

Most of Creech's novels deal with the themes of loss and abandonment. She writes such heartfelt stories about the characters and their losses that the reader has to wonder what she has experienced to get the emotions so right. Creech is not sure why this is the case, but she offers some insight: "I started writing seriously in 1986 after my father died. He had suffered a stroke in 1980, and I would think about all those words locked up for six years because his mind could neither accept nor deliver words. The connection between my father's death and my flood of writing might be that I had been confronted with the dark wall of mortality; we don't have endless time to follow our dreams. But it might also be that I felt obligated to use the words that my father could not."

Creech offers great advice to aspiring writers: "Read a lot and write a lot. Reading widely allows you to absorb how other writers develop stories, and it allows you to hear many different kinds of voices and approaches to storytelling. Like any skill, writing takes practice. Try different forms when you write: poetry, short stories, and plays. Have fun and experiment." It is obvious that Sharon Creech has taken her own advice.

Visit SharonCreech.com to learn more about the author and her novels!



Love That Dog

Tr 0-06-029287-3 Au 0-06-008790-0

Additional Activities for the Classroom

Sharon Creech says. "Love That Dog comes very close to what I hoped it

might be, and it also came out fluidly, as if I was recording it instead of making it up. I love the boy in the book, and I love his teacher."

About the Book

Jack hates poetry and he thinks that only girls write it, until his teacher, Ms. Stretchberry, inspires him to read poetry and the work of Walter Dean Myers, who wrote a poem that touches his heart. Jack's teacher says that Jack has poetry inside him and she knows what to do to help this budding poet blossom into a writer. As Jack attempts to read and write poetry, he realizes he does have something to say, and that others will want to hear what it is. Jack is also instrumental in getting Mr. Myers himself to come to his school to talk about his poem. After this visit, Jack will be forever changed.

Suggested Activities

Love that Dog is a great read-aloud. If each student doesn't have his/her own copy of Love That Dog, use an overhead projector to show the class how the words are written on the page as the teacher reads from the book. Then read aloud each of the referenced poems from the book before getting to the part where Jack comments on them. For example, read "The Red Wheelbarrow" and/or "The Pasture" and then read Jack's reactions to these poems. Ask the students to share their reaction to both the poem and Jack's comments about the poem.

Have students write a poem responding to one or more of the poems Jack read. Students might want to publish the poem on colored paper using colored ink.

Ask students to find a poem that they can "fall in love with," one that speaks to their heart. Then have students use it as a model to write their own poem, as Jack did. Ask students to explain why the poem speaks to them.

Ask students who their favorite author is. Have students keep a journal where they express the kinds of feelings and emotions an author's work evokes in them. Encourage students to use examples from the author's work. Based on their journal entries, students might want to draft a letter to the author.



Absolutely Normal Chaos

Tr 0-06-026989-8 Pb 0-06-440632

Mary Lou Finney is less than excited about her assignment to keep a journal over the

summer. But, what starts out as the dull dog days of summer quickly turns into the wildest roller coaster ride of all time.



Bloomability

Tr 0-06-026993-6 Pb 0-06-440823-X

When her aunt and uncle take her from New Mexico to Lugano, Switzerland, to attend an international school,

thirteen-year-old Dinnie discovers her world expanding. As she experiences skiing and meeting new friends, Dinnie comes to a new understanding of who she is.

Young Adult Choices (IRA)



Chasing Redbird

Tr 0-06-026987-1 Pb 0-06-440696-2

After her aunt dies suddenly, thirteenyear-old Zinnia Taylor begins the obsessive task of clearing a

twenty-mile trail behind her family's farm in Kentucky and starts to understand the death of her toddler cousin, her uncle's erratic behavior, and the attentions of a cute neighbor named Jake.



Pleasing the Ghost

Tr 0-06-026985-5 Pb 0-06-440686-5

The ghost of his Uncle Arvie visits nine-year-old Dennis, whose uncle and

father died within a year of one another, and together they settle some unfinished family business. Dennis also makes a friend of the school bully.



Ruby Holler New!

Tr 0-06-027732-7 Au 0-06-008786-2

After being abandoned as infants on the doorstep of an orphanage, the twins

Dallas and Florida move in and out of foster homes until they meet Sairy and Tiller, a couple willing to share their adventures, their love, and their home.



Walk Two Moons

Tr 0-06-023334-6 Pb 0-06-440517-6 Au 0-694-70051-7

After her mother leaves home suddenly, thirteen-year-old Sal

and her grandparents take a car trip retracing her mother's route. Along the way, Sal recounts the story of her friend Phoebe, and in doing so reveals her own life story.

- Newbery Medal Winner
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- School Library Journal Best Book
- Winner of a *Bulletin* Blue Ribbon
- A Notable Children's Trade Book in the Language Arts (NCTE)
- Winner of the Heartland Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature



The Wanderer

Tr 0-06-027730-0 Pb 0-06-441032-3

Thirteen-year-old Sophie, her two cousins, and her three uncles sail across the Atlantic Ocean to

England in a 45-foot sailboat to visit their grandfather in England. Sophie tries desperately to prove herself as a sailor, and she and her cousin Cody record the adventures and dangers they experience on their transatlantic journey.

- A Newbery Honor Book
- An ALA Notable Children's Book
- ALA Best Book for Young Adults
- School Library Journal Best Book
- Booklist Editor's Choice
- Winner of the Bulletin Blue Ribbon

For additional activities and teaching ideas, visit our website www.harperchildrens.com