

# Adventure into Literature Circles with Will Hobbs

## For Grades 5 up

### Help your students discover the adventure and mystery in books using Literature Circles.

Literature Circles are small student-led discussion groups comprised of 4 to 5 students who read the same student-selected books. 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 book 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 adventure novels of Will Hobbs: *Ghost Canoe*, *Far North*, *Wild Man Island*, *Jason's Gold*, *Down the Yukon*, and his newest book, *Jackie's Wild Seattle*. Students will be able to compare Hobbs's novels across the texts because they possess similarities in theme, character traits, setting, and writing style.

### Getting Started

Before setting up the Literature Circles, explain each individual role—**Director**, **Passage Detective**, **Researcher**, **Connector**, and **Vocabulary Enricher** (see definitions below)—and assign one to each student. Explain to students that the group discussions are conversations about their reading even though roles are assigned; all students will contribute to all areas of discussion.

**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 two important ideas presented in the novel?
- 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 do the characters show integrity? Honesty? Courage?

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

For example:

I couldn't help but wonder what his home life must be like and why he was at Jackie's in the first place.

Something told me I didn't really want the answers. (pg. 40, *Jackie's Wild Seattle*)

"Uh-oh," I said. "This is Tyler's place, Uncle Neal. I think this is one call we should forget about."

(pg. 179, *Jackie's Wild Seattle*)

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

For example:

- Whale hunting techniques and laws protecting the whales (*Ghost Canoe*)
- Diamond mining in the Northwest Territories (*Far North*)
- Wild-life preservation and migration in Alaska (*Wild Man Island*)
- Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organizations (*Jackie's Wild Seattle*)

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

For example:

Television: *Survivor*

Movies: *Cast Away*, *Swiss Family Robinson*

**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 there are five students in a group.*

Once students understand the concept of Literature Circles and have experienced a sampling of the variety of ways students can interact with the text, ask them to keep character or dialectical journals to use in their circle discussions.

## **Novel Selection**

Booktalk each novel so that students will know what the book is about before they choose which book they want to read. A booktalk is a two-to five-minute/teaser enticing the listeners to read the book.

- The first sentence must grab the listeners' attention.
- Then, tell about a dramatic incident or a character or read a short key passage.
- End the booktalk at the climax of the story so the listeners are eager to find out what happens next.

Remember, a booktalk is not a book review, a book report, or a book analysis. It reaches out to the listeners and involves them in the book, to convince them to read the book. You can use the summaries below or write a booktalk of your own using these guidelines:

- Compose a one-to five-minute description of a dramatic incident, a plot overview, or a character study that will involve students. Include a short key passage to read aloud if time permits.
- Start booktalks with action, excitement, or horror to hook the readers.

Have students select three books and prioritize them. The teacher can then assign students to reading groups by the title selected, but every student should be able to read one of their prioritized selections.

### ***Far North***

Tr 0-688-14192-7

Pb 0-380-72536-3

Gabe and Raymond, two boys from vastly different cultures, survive the destruction of their float plane in the Canadian Northwest only to be attacked by a bear and nearly frozen to death by subzero temperatures. They return from their adventure out of the icy wilderness to the safety of Raymond's village much wiser and more adept at survival.

### ***Ghost Canoe***

Tr 0-688-14193-5

Pb 0-380-72537-1

Nathan MacAllister and his father, the lighthouse keeper on Tatoosh Island, witness a sailing ship break up in a storm, and the authorities are sure there are no survivors. However, unexplained footprints on a desolate beach, a theft at the trading post, and glimpses of a wild "hairy man" convince Nathan that someone is hiding in the remote sea caves along the coast. Nathan uncovers the truth, but it almost costs him his life and the life of his good friend.

### ***Jason's Gold***

Tr 0-688-15093-4

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Jason determines to strike it rich in the Klondike Gold Rush, but he has no idea when he sets out that his search for gold will take him 5,000 miles into treacherous country, facing wild bears and moose. He stows away on steamers, rides trains, packs over mountain passes, canoes rivers and rapids, and meets people and animals who help him along the way.

### ***Down the Yukon***

Tr 0-688-17472-8

Pb 0-380-73309-9

Jason and his brothers have been cheated out of their sawmill, and Jason vows to buy it back. When a race to Nome, Alaska, is announced with a \$20,000 prize, Jason and his girlfriend, Jamie, set out to travel the two thousand miles. The Great Race across Alaska will be a grueling test for the two of them as they face the hazards of the Yukon River, two very dangerous men, and the terrors of the open sea.

### ***Jackie's Wild Seattle***

Tr 0-688-17474-4

When their parents go to Pakistan and Afghanistan to work with Doctors Without Borders, Shannon and her younger brother, Cody, spend the summer in Seattle, Washington, with their uncle Neal, who is a wildlife rescuer. Shannon and Cody's adventures change their lives, and they learn a great deal by helping their uncle rescue injured wild animals.

### ***Wild Man Island***

Tr 0-688-17473-6

Pb 0-380-73310-2

Andy ventures off on his own on the last day of a sea kayaking trip and a strong wind sweeps him off course to an island covered in forest and populated with bears. Running for his life, Andy retreats deep into a cave to escape a wild man and finds danger and suspense, as well as what may be an important archaeological discovery.

## **Additional Information about Literature Circles**

- Have students set up a reading schedule that allows the novel to be completed in three to four weeks. Whether you give your students time in class to read or you assign outside reading is up to you. The researcher will also need additional time to research topics on which he or she has chosen to focus.

- The Literature Circle should meet once a week for 20 to 30 minutes if your school has block scheduling. If your class meets daily, you will want to have Literature Circle meetings at least twice a week. You might want to meet more regularly at first, then taper off to the above recommendation.
- Students should come to their sessions prepared with questions, research found, passages to discuss, and connections. Students can bring in illustrations, but everything must be in writing.
- Roles of the students may change from meeting to meeting to allow each student to experience a different role.

**In addition to the questions outlined above, ask students to determine how the following ideas apply to the novel and to focus on them in their discussions:**

Themes: survival, courage, adventure, self-discovery, friendship

Characters: honest, open-minded, courageous, risk takers

Setting: extreme weather, wilderness area

Writing Style: historical, use of imagery, research-based

As each group reads, the participants 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, setting, 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. The emphasis should be on “selling” the book to other students. Groups could choose one or more of these options, or suggest another idea for group sharing:

- Make a collage that might be found hanging in the bedroom of one of the characters and write a brief explanation of each item selected. For example, Raymond in *Far North* might have pictures of beavers and their dams, a piece of moose hide, the letter from Johnny Raven, a rifle bullet, and a guitar string.
- Write diary entries that one of the characters might have written during the course of his or her adventure.
- Write a poem or song that expresses one or more of the characters’ feelings—for example, Cody’s trauma over witnessing the attack on the World Trade Center (*Jackie’s Wild Seattle*, pages 16–18), and how he ultimately learns to deal with his feelings.

- Create a piece of original artwork that interprets one of the themes of the book. Create a “Save the Wildlife” poster using an original slogan that *Jackie’s Wild Seattle* could use to inform the public about protecting wildlife.
- Write and perform an original skit based on a passage in the book—for example, the rescue of a wild animal by Uncle Neal, Shannon, and Cody in *Jackie’s Wild Seattle*.
- Write letters that two of the characters might have written to one another about what was happening in their lives. What would Jason and his brothers have written to each other while Jason was racing to Nome in *Down the Yukon*?
- Write and record an original news broadcast about the events in the book. Andy’s mother was frantic when he was reported lost and supposed dead in Alaska. What would she have said to the news media about finding her son and how would she have reported the events of his disappearance?
- Write and illustrate a picture book based on the characters and events.
- Cast the characters in a movie based on the book and develop a commercial for the movie to be presented to the class.
- Write a letter to Mr. Hobbs telling him the impact the book has had.
- Stage a news conference or interview, with Will Hobbs played by one of the group members.
- Write a booktalk of the book you read using a song, poem, limerick, or letter.

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 Detective, the information found by the Researcher, and the connections discovered by the Connector. Later, the written assignments could include character and dialectical journals and illustrations. As the teacher visits with each Literature Circle, he or she can check these, and each Circle should hand in their individual assignments 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 into how their final product should be evaluated and this should be determined prior to the completion of the assignment. Emphasis on encouraging other students to read, the quality of the product, and the presentation of the product should all be taken into consideration.

## Activities Across the Curriculum

**Social Studies**—In *Far North*, the Dene People live in the Northwest Territory, and in *Ghost Canoe* the Makah Tribe lives on the Northwest coast. Ask students to investigate how these people lived in the early 1900s and how they live now. Students can use the information they have found to reenact a Slavey/Makah celebration. Brainstorm with the students ways they can celebrate the Slavey/Makah ways of life. For example, some students could tell a story to the class. Other students could contribute to

the atmosphere by building a model of the type of homes the Dene People lived in, constructing a model of a Makah canoe, making the drum the Dene people used, or drawing a picture of any aspect of Dene or Makah life.

**Geography**—In the front of each book, Mr. Hobbs gives his readers a map of the area where his story takes place. Ask students to make a relief map (a relief map is made from clay or Play-doh and depicts the surface of the land) showing the mountain ranges and rivers of the area using colored clay. Then students can use string and pins to trace the routes the characters in their book took to make their escape from the dangerous situation in which they found themselves. When the maps are completed, ask students to make a recording using a cassette tape recorder describing specific places on the map and what happened at those places in the book. Display each map with a tape player and the recording about the map, and then, as in a museum exhibit, all the students in the class can take a scenic tour of the maps around the room and listen to the recordings.

**Science**—In Mr. Hobbs’s books, there is concern shown for the preservation of wildlife and wilderness. In *Far North* Johnny Raven states, “Take care of the land, take care of yourself, take care of each other” (pg. 213). Find examples throughout each adventure book Mr. Hobbs has written to show this underlying theme. Investigate current projects in your community and around the world that are attempting to save wildlife and natural habitats. Call or write the organizations and find out how many paid workers and volunteers they have, what types of animals they rescue, and the statistics on how many animals they save. Report your findings to the class.

**Language Arts**—In *Jackie’s Wild Seattle*, in one of the e-mails Shannon receives from her mother, her mother states, “Each of us can only make a small difference but together we can make a big difference” (pg. 84). Brainstorm with your class ways they can make a difference. Discuss the ideas and choose one project to complete that will make a difference in the lives of the people in the school, the community, or the world. This activity may be as detailed or general as time permits.

**Language Arts**—In *Jackie’s Wild Seattle*, Cody and his uncle Neal were always looking for funny and unique bumper stickers. Uncle Neal states, “Without bumper stickers, wisdom itself would be impossible” (pg. 9). Ask students to bring in bumper stickers, or sayings they have seen on bumper stickers. Discuss the meaning of the words, and ask students to speculate why a person would put that particular sticker on their vehicle. Then ask students to choose a character from one of Mr. Hobbs’s books who would put a bumper sticker on his or her car. It could be one that was brought to class if appropriate to the character’s personality or students can write their own bumper sticker copy for the character. Either way, students should find evidence from the book to support their choice.

**Health**—One of the major fears expressed by Andy in *Wild Man Island*, Gabe and Raymond in *Far North*, and Jason in *Jason’s Gold* was how long they could survive without food and water and how their bodies would be affected by the lack of food and water. Investigate the effects of dehydration and malnutrition on the human body. How

long can a person survive without food and water before he or she dies? What kinds of things happen as the body adapts to less food and water? Report your findings to the class.

**Art**—Mr. Hobbs uses imagery to paint pictures with words so that readers can see the scene unfolding in their mind’s eye. Choose a scene from one of his novels that was especially real to you, and draw a picture of that scene, for example, the description of the wild man’s cave on pages 98–101 in *Wild Man Island* or the description at the bottom of page 39 in *Ghost Canoe* of the killer whales feeding on schools of herring.

For additional classroom activities and author interview, log on to the official Will Hobbs Web Site at [www.WillHobbsAuthor.com](http://www.WillHobbsAuthor.com)

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Teaching ideas prepared by Susan Geye, Library Media Specialist, the Crowley Ninth Grade Campus, Ft. Worth, Texas.

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