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## Literary Discussions in the Modern Classroom: Online and In-person Implementation Strategies

**Albert Carter**   
Jackson State University, USA

**DeSuan Dixon**   
Jackson State University, USA

**Xia Li**   
Jackson State University, USA

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## Literary Discussions in the Modern Classroom: Online and In-person Implementation Strategies

Albert Carter, DeSuan Dixon, Xia Li

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### Abstract

Literary discussions are widely utilized in education, yet their profound impact on students' comprehension requires in-depth exploration. This paper delves into the influence of literary discussions on student comprehension and examines how these discussions can enhance students' understanding and analytical skills. Through literature reviews and case analyses, this study investigates teaching strategies, student engagement levels, classroom ambiance, and other factors involved in literary discussions, revealing the potential mechanisms through which literary discussions influence student comprehension. The paper explores variations in the application of literary discussions across different types of literary works (novels, poetry, drama, etc.) and their relationship with students' creative thinking. Finally, the paper provides recommendations to assist educators in effectively utilizing literary discussions to enhance students' comprehension skills. Students must have the opportunity to discuss literature in ways that provoke deep thought and meaning from each work they encounter. Therefore, English Language Arts teachers and instructors must be creative in finding unique ways in which they encourage their students to experience and respond to literature. This paper discusses a variety of strategies to implement in virtual and in-person classrooms, such as Socratic seminar, Teacher-led as a facilitator, Teacher-led as a promoter of diverse perspectives, Using student-generated discussion questions whole class, Using student-generated discussion questions in small groups, Using Close-ended questions, Using Open-ended questions, Inquiry-based, Making real-world connections to the literature, Literature Circles. These literary discussion strategies can be used for both fiction and nonfiction literature.

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### Introduction

#### **Background: Application of Literary Discussions in Education**

Literary discussions have a long-standing tradition in educational settings as a means to explore the depth and nuances of literary works. Educators have employed literary discussions to engage students in critical thinking, develop analytical skills, and foster a deeper understanding of complex texts. The application of literary discussions spans various forms of literature, including novels, poetry, short stories, and drama. This pedagogical approach encourages students to actively interact with the material, share their interpretations, and learn from their

peers. While literary discussions have been widely embraced, their effectiveness in enhancing student comprehension remains a subject of significant interest and scrutiny.

### **Problem Statement: The Extent and Mechanisms of the Impact of Literary Discussions on Student Comprehension**

Despite the prevalent use of literary discussions, questions persist regarding the magnitude of their influence on student comprehension. Many educators and researchers recognize that literary discussions can lead to improved comprehension, but the specific mechanisms through which these discussions impact students are not always well-defined. It is crucial to address the precise nature of this influence, considering factors such as classroom dynamics, student engagement, and the choice of literary works. Additionally, assessing the differential impact of literary discussions across various genres, including novels, poetry, drama, and non-fiction, remains an important research endeavor. This paper aims to explore the extent of the impact of literary discussions on student comprehension while uncovering the underlying mechanisms that contribute to this effect.

To comprehensively address these questions, this paper is structured to provide a detailed exploration of the impact of literary discussions on student comprehension. It begins with an examination of the background and historical context of literary discussions in educational settings, setting the stage for a deeper understanding of their relevance. The problem statement is established, focusing on the need to elucidate the extent and mechanisms of the impact of literary discussions.

Finally, an overview of the paper structure is presented, providing a roadmap for the subsequent sections that will delve into the teaching strategies, classroom dynamics, student engagement, and the influence of literary discussions on student comprehension across different literary genres. This paper seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the topic, shedding light on the multifaceted relationship between literary discussions and student comprehension.

## **Teaching Strategies in Literary Discussions**

### **Analysis of Effective Teaching Methods in Literary Discussions**

Effective teaching methods in literary discussions are essential for promoting student engagement, critical thinking, and a deeper understanding of literature. To achieve these goals, educators employ various strategies, such as the Socratic method, reader-response approach, and close reading techniques. This paper critically analyzes these methods, evaluating their strengths, weaknesses, and applicability in different educational contexts. By examining the effectiveness of these teaching strategies, educators can make informed decisions about which approach best suits their specific goals and the needs of their students.

### **Comparisons between Traditional and Modern Approaches**

The landscape of education is continuously evolving, with traditional approaches to literary discussions facing

challenges from modern, technology-driven methods (Quick, 2021). This section of the paper explores the key differences between traditional classroom discussions and contemporary, technology-enhanced approaches. It examines the impact of digital platforms, online forums, and multimedia resources on literary discussions. By drawing comparisons between these approaches, the paper seeks to provide insights into the advantages and limitations of each, helping educators make informed choices regarding the integration of technology in their teaching practices.

### **Case Studies Illustrating Successful Teaching Strategies**

To provide concrete examples of effective teaching methods in literary discussions, this paper includes a series of case studies showcasing successful implementations. These case studies encompass various teaching scenarios, including high school literature classes, university seminars, and online learning environments. Each case study highlights a specific teaching strategy, the educational context in which it was applied, and the outcomes achieved. By presenting real-world examples of successful literary discussions, this paper aims to inspire educators and provide practical insights into how to adapt these strategies to their teaching settings.

By addressing these three central themes, this paper offers a comprehensive exploration of effective teaching methods in literary discussions. It combines critical analysis, comparative perspectives, and practical illustrations to provide a holistic view of how educators can engage students in meaningful literary dialogues and enhance their comprehension of literary works. Through this research, educators can make informed decisions about the most suitable strategies for their teaching objectives and the evolving landscape of educational technology.

## **Student Engagement and Classroom Ambiance**

### **Importance of Student Participation in Literary Discussions**

Student participation is a cornerstone of effective literary discussions in educational settings. It not only fosters a dynamic and engaging classroom environment but also plays a crucial role in enhancing comprehension and critical thinking skills. Actively involving students in discussions encourages them to interact with the text, share their interpretations, and consider multiple perspectives. Through this process, they refine their analytical abilities and develop a deeper understanding of the literary work.

This section explores the significance of student participation in literary discussions and underscores its direct correlation with improved comprehension. Student-led discussions positively impact peer collaboration and confidence (Adams & Turner, 2018). By actively engaging in dialogue, students become active learners, and their grasp of complex literary concepts is greatly enriched.

### **Creating a Conducive Classroom Environment for Discussions**

The classroom environment significantly influences the success of literary discussions. Educators play a pivotal role in shaping this environment to be conducive to open dialogue, respectful exchanges, and meaningful

interactions. This section delves into the strategies and practices that educators can employ to create a positive atmosphere for literary discussions. Topics covered include the establishment of ground rules, the use of inclusive language, and the encouragement of active listening. Inclusivity in discussion techniques ensures that diverse perspectives and voices are valued in the classroom and leads to a more culturally responsive classroom environment (Mandarani & Munir, 2021). By fostering an environment where students feel safe to express their thoughts and explore diverse viewpoints, educators pave the way for fruitful literary discussions that, in turn, enhance comprehension levels.

### **Influence of Classroom Ambiance on Comprehension Levels**

The physical setting and ambiance of a classroom can impact students' comprehension levels during literary discussions. Factors such as seating arrangements, lighting, and overall comfort play a role in students' focus and engagement. This section explores the research and practical considerations related to classroom ambiance and its influence on the effectiveness of literary discussions. It emphasizes the importance of optimizing the physical learning space to promote attentiveness and active participation. By understanding how classroom ambiance affects student comprehension, educators can make informed decisions about creating an environment that maximizes the benefits of literary discussions.

### **Literary Discussions across Different Genres**

#### **Varied Approaches to Discussing Novels, Poetry, and Drama**

Literary discussions in an educational context can encompass a wide range of genres, including novels, poetry, and drama. Each genre presents unique opportunities and challenges for educators and students. This section explores the distinct approaches required for discussing these different forms of literature. It delves into strategies for encouraging in-depth analysis of novels, the exploration of symbolism and language in poetry, and the examination of character development and dramatic elements in plays. By understanding the varied approaches, educators can tailor their teaching methods to suit the specific demands of each genre, ultimately enhancing students' comprehension and critical thinking abilities.

#### **Exploring Unique Challenges and Advantages in Each Genre**

While literary discussions offer valuable opportunities for students to engage with literature, they also present distinctive challenges and advantages depending on the genre under consideration. This section provides an in-depth analysis of the specific hurdles and benefits associated with discussing novels, poetry, and drama. It discusses challenges such as the length and complexity of novels, the condensed and figurative language of poetry, and the interpretive demands of drama. Simultaneously, it highlights the advantages, such as the rich character development in novels, the poetic devices used in poetry, and the visual and performative elements of drama. Educators can benefit from a nuanced understanding of these factors when planning and conducting literary discussions, ultimately facilitating more effective comprehension and analysis.

## **Integrating Multimedia Resources into Discussions for Enhanced Comprehension**

In today's digital age, the integration of multimedia resources into literary discussions offers a powerful means of enhancing comprehension. Teachers should incorporate technology tools, online platforms, multimedia resources, and digital literature analysis tools (Quick, 2021). This section explores the advantages and strategies for incorporating multimedia elements, such as video clips, audio recordings, and visual aids, into literary discussions. It highlights how multimedia can bring texts to life, providing students with visual and auditory experiences that deepen their understanding of literary works. By incorporating multimedia, educators can cater to diverse learning styles and offer fresh perspectives on the material. The section also discusses the importance of selecting appropriate multimedia resources that align with the learning objectives and content of the discussion. Through the skillful use of multimedia, educators can create a more immersive and engaging learning experience, ultimately leading to improved comprehension among students.

## **Literary Discussions and Creative Thinking**

### **Relationship between Literary Discussions and Fostering Creative Thinking Skills**

Literary discussions play a pivotal role in nurturing creative thinking skills among students. By engaging in critical analysis, interpretation, and open dialogues about literary works, students are encouraged to think beyond the surface and explore diverse perspectives. Literary discussions expose students to various narrative techniques, symbolism, and thematic elements that stimulate their imaginative thinking. This section delves into the close relationship between literary discussions and the development of creative thinking skills. Literature discussions engage students on deeper levels with a text. This translates into patterns of thought and understanding that enrich every subsequent reading experience (Yoder, 2001). It outlines how the act of dissecting literature not only enhances comprehension but also fosters creativity by encouraging students to explore new ideas and innovative interpretations.

### **Encouraging Students to Express Unique Interpretations and Ideas**

One of the key goals of literary discussions is to inspire students to articulate their unique interpretations and ideas about a text. This process of articulation and expression is fundamental to creative thinking. This section explores how educators can create an environment that empowers students to voice their distinct perspectives, even if they differ from conventional analyses. It emphasizes the importance of fostering a classroom atmosphere where diverse viewpoints are welcomed and respected. Students should feel encouraged to challenge existing interpretations and propose alternative readings, thereby promoting creative thinking. By recognizing the significance of individual expression and nurturing this aspect in literary discussions, educators can effectively enhance students' creative thinking abilities. There are many benefits to having students engaged in literature discussions. Literary discussion, such as asynchronous online discussions (AOD) can lead to greater creative and critical thinking skills for students. This also incorporates the use of technology, since it requires some form of a digital platform, such as Zoom, Canvas, Google Classroom, etc. Developing critical thinking skills can help students in many areas of learning and will assist in their ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, and judge various

pieces of information (Foo, 2019). Educators are often seeking ways to address higher-order levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Deep literature discussion is a way to initiate the process of having students think beyond the surface and make meaning of content.

## **Strategies for Engaging Students in Literary Discussions**

There are several great strategies that teachers can implement in the classroom that can engage students in deep, meaningful discussions around literature.

### **Socratic Seminar**

The Socratic Seminar strategy is often used when you want students to do a close read and analysis of a text. It is a form of structured discourse about ideas and moral dilemmas (Tredway, 1995). Therefore, you must select a text that allows for various interpretations, perceptions, meanings, and in-depth discussion. Texts that do not allow deep meaning and thought will not yield much for students to discuss. Make sure the text is of the appropriate length, depending on class time and/or other factors. Students should be informed of the protocols for the seminar. They are not to argue for their point of view but to look past the surface to make a deeper connection with the text and the author's purpose (Holden & Schmit, 2002). Students should read the text before or during the discussion time (seminar). Then, students will respond to a question posed by the teacher related to the text (Tredway, 1995). The questions should not be closed-ended or ones that have a certain right or wrong answer. Open-ended questions work best in these settings. Closed-end types of questions will not require much thought and cause a very short discussion. At some point during the discourse, students should make decisions and evaluate options, and reject or defend positions. The questions should require deep thought and text-based evidence to support their thoughts and positions. Holden and Schmit pose some rules to consider as you structure your Socratic seminars:

- Talk to each other, not just to the discussion leader or teacher.
- Refer to evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Ask questions if you do not understand what someone has said, or you can paraphrase what another student has said for clarification ("I think you said this; is that right?").
- You do not need to raise your hand to speak, but please pay attention to your "airtime"—how much you have spoken about other students.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't "put down" the ideas of another student. Without judging the student you disagree with, state your alternate interpretation or ask a follow-up question to help probe or clarify an idea.

Socratic seminar is a way to have students think critically and focus their attention on a particular work. Although widely used in the English/Language Arts classroom, they can be used to foster discussions in other subject areas too, such as science (Chowning, 2009). The Socratic seminar has not only helped students understand and engage better with literature but it has also been linked to increased job satisfaction among teachers (Mangrum, 2010).

This strategy can be used both in-person and in online settings. The teacher would have to structure somewhat differently for online settings.

### **Student-Led Literary Discussion**

There is great value when students learn to lead their own discussions about the literature. In these classes, as one would assume, students talk more. In one study, the researcher noted that students spoke 90% when they led the discussion around literature (Knoeller, 1993). In one approach, students are given a master question to write about for 10 minutes and are allowed to discuss it openly after the writing period (Holden & Schmit, 2002). This approach is better for students who have difficulty thinking of their responses on the spot or immediately. They are given some time to think about the text and develop their thoughts. This model is also helpful for students who do not have much experience in literature discussion and need motivation to write. Students have a wide range of options to draw upon in their discussions, including their opinions that support or refute those of others, the ability to connect the text to other texts or relevant experiences, or the ability to bring a whole new perspective to the topic. This strategy can be implemented in an in-person or virtual classroom.

### **Playing Twenty Questions with Literature**

Questioning is a great tool to use as you lead literary discussions in the classroom. However, teachers can get stuck with trying to create different questions to address all the different aspects of a piece of literature. There is no possible way to develop an exhaustive list of approaches to analyzing every piece of work. However, this article and other works seek to provide ways to analyze, discuss, and interpret literature. As a guide to leading discussions and giving students various ways to respond to a plethora of artistic works, including poems, films, plays, novels, movies, etc., the following questions are great tools to initiate thought (Holden & Schmit, 2002):

1. Questions of Plot and Structure
2. Questions of Motifs and Symbols
3. Questions of Character
4. Questions of Style
5. Questions of Genre
6. Burkean Approaches to Literature
7. Questions of Heroism, Villainy, and Monstrosity, of Good and Evil (Quality)
8. Questions of Authorial Expression, Ideology, and Psychology (Expressive Criticism)
9. Questions of Reality and Depiction (Mimetic Criticism)
10. Questions of Narration and Silence (Viewpoint)
11. Questions of Change (Process, History, and Relationship with Text)
12. Questions of Rhetoric (Rhetorical Criticism)
13. Questions of Race, Gender, and Class (Multicultural, Feminist, and Marxist Criticism)
14. Questions of Canon (“But is it art”)
15. Questions of Culture (Cultural Criticism)



16. Questions of Morality or Ethics ("Is it good art?")
17. Questions of Intertextuality and Deconstruction (Metatextuality)
18. Questions of Traditions, Periods, and Locales
19. Questions of Comparison and Contrast
20. Questions of Reaction (Reader Response)

### **Using Student-Generated Questions**

One way of getting students more involved in the discussion process is to use questions they have generated. This truly deepens the inquiry process. Why should the teacher or facilitator be the only one allowed to pose questions about a work? Students become active participants in the learning process and not just receivers of knowledge. Focusing on students' ideas and questions in literature discussions supports them in developing and articulating rich and powerful understandings, which lead to deep and defensible interpretations of various works (Effective Literature Instruction Develops Thinking Skills, 2001). Students can formulate their thoughts and ideas about a work. "There is no knowledge without a knower... Human beings are active meaning makers who are continually learning making personal knowledge---when they can act according to their purposes" (Mayer, as cited in Holden & Schmit). Students develop cognitively by bringing their own sets of questions, ideas, and images about the literature. The teacher is not only allowing students to be free as creative beings but empowering them to take charge of the discussion and promote student voice. Holden and Schmit go further by providing 10 examples of the type of student questions that can be used in literary discussions. Providing this list can aid and guide students as they create what they will ask about the work.

1. Creating One Key Question about a Literary Work
2. Creating One Key Question and Explaining Its Importance
3. Creating a List of Important Questions about a Literary Work
4. Creating a List of Important Questions and Rank-Ordering Them
5. Creating a List of Important Questions and Rank-Ordering Them with an Explanation
6. Creating Questions Based on Purves and Ripere's Four Categories of Response
  - A. Engagement-involvement
  - B. Perception.
  - C. Interpretation.
  - D. Evaluation
7. Creating a Set of Questions Focused on Literary Elements
8. Creating a Set of Questions Based on the Questioning Circle
9. Creating a Set of Questions Focused on Literal and Inferential Levels of Questions
10. Creating Questions Based on Particular Critical Approaches

### **Literature Circles**

Literature circles have been widely used for a long time as a way to have students of all ages engage with literature. There are also different formats used for literature circles. Literature circles are a way for students to take ownership of their learning around literary works (Quick, 2021). Literature circles can also be used to enhance

the learning and engagement of English Language Learners (Casey et al., 2020). The benefits of using this format are endless because you can use the circles across various genres and even in other subjects when you want to elicit deep discussion. The traditional way of implementing a literature circle started with the teacher assigning a particular book or story for the class to read. Then, the class is divided into small groups to begin their discussion around the work. In each group, the teacher assigns roles for each participant to play in their meeting time. These roles can vary by the nature of the work, class dynamics, teacher preferences, etc. The roles usually include discussion director, literary luminary, vocabulary discussor, summarizer, connector, investigatory, literary element finder, and others as assigned by the teacher.

- **The Facilitator:** provides a summary of the chapters read and chooses one interesting passage to read to the group
- **Discussion Director:** creates higher-order thinking questions to ask the group during meetings
- **The Investigator:** finds additional information that may help the group better understand the chapters read (e.g., background information on the author, history of the topic/main problem/theme/setting, and/or different character perspectives)
- **The Connector:** makes text-to-text, text-to-self, and text-to-world connections to the reading
- **The Illustrator:** creates a drawing or visual representation of the chapters read and explains the significance of what they drew
- **Vocabulary Inspector:** helps the group better understand the words and descriptive/figurative language used in the text
- **Figurative language finder:** identification of various types of figurative language, including but not limited to simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and idiom.



In modern classrooms, teachers have used technology to enhance the literature circle. Students can now read stories digitally. Students can also use several tools to enhance their role in the circle (Quick, 2021). The Discussion Director can use Blogs, Google Docs, Whiteboard, and other tools. The Vocabulary Discussor can

use Quizlet to create a quiz or Padlet to lead the discussion. Also, if students are learning virtually instead of in person, the teacher can create the literature circles in Zoom by assigning students to various breakout rooms to discuss the work. Assign a leader to ensure the groups stay on task within the allotted time and that every person participates.

### **Case Studies Demonstrating the Correlation between Literary Discussions and Improved Creative Thinking**

To underscore the impact of literary discussions on creative thinking, this section presents case studies showcasing instances where literary discourse led to improved creative thinking skills among students. These real-world examples provide concrete evidence of the correlation between literary discussions and enhanced creativity. The case studies reveal how students who actively participated in literary discussions exhibited greater creativity in their writing, critical thinking, understanding of the work, and problem-solving. They highlight the transformation of students who, through engagement in discussions, developed the confidence to think beyond traditional boundaries and cultivate inventive ideas. These cases serve as tangible proof that literary discussions are a potent tool for nurturing creative thinking skills in an educational context.

Walters (2022) completed a study in which she explored how the Socratic seminar strategy affected the reading comprehension and literacy skills of adult learners. The study included 5 English professors and their 51 students at a university. The study revealed that Socratic seminars and oral-literary discussions aided in improving literacy and reading comprehension for the participants. There was also a study using a Socratic seminar done with middle school students in Eastern Tennessee (Polite & Adams, 1996). The design of the seminars was to give students opportunities to take part in high-level literary discussions to dissect ideals, principles, social issues, and values. Thirty-four students and eight teachers participated in the study, which found that both teachers and students were satisfied with the use of the Socratic seminar in increasing higher-order thinking skills and conflict resolution.

Casey et al. (2020) in a study used modified literature circles to promote literacy among 5th-grade English Language Learners. The study implemented a researcher-made pre-test in a science class on the phases of the moon. Students received direct instruction, engaged in literature circles, created “Phases of the Moon” booklets, and took a post-test. The final results showed that student learning had increased between the pre and post-assessments. Although researchers could not ascertain which strategy was most effective in achieving positive results, students were highly engaged and motivated to discuss during the literature circle time.

### **Conclusion**

The impact of literary discussions on student comprehension is profound, emphasizing the importance of diverse teaching approaches that blend traditional and modern methods. Educators should actively encourage student participation, fostering a classroom environment that promotes open dialogue and creative thinking. Technology, including online platforms and multimedia resources, should be harnessed to enhance accessibility and engagement. Future research should focus on comparative studies across various literary genres, exploring

multimedia integration, evaluating long-term effects on comprehension and retention, and investigating interdisciplinary approaches to maximize the benefits for students and educators alike.

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**Author Information**


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**Albert Carter**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0546-2290>


Jackson State University  
1400 John R. Lynch Street  
Jackson, MS 39217  
USA  
Contact e-mail: [albert.w.carter@jsums.edu](mailto:albert.w.carter@jsums.edu)

**DeSuan Dixon**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-4418-0471>

Jackson State University  
1400 John R. Lynch Street  
Jackson, MS 39217  
USA

**Xia Li**

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8331-6121>

Jackson State University  
1400 John R. Lynch Street  
Jackson, MS 39217  
USA

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