

RIVER READING CIRCLE

Students participate in a reading circle as a means of studying river-related poetry.

TEACHER NOTES FOR DISCUSSION

This format can be used with any type of literature in any subject area. Use the poems at the end of this activity or add other river-related material.

Suggestions for a successful literature circle activity

- Students should choose to work with a group based on individual interest in a particular poem.
- Each group should study a different poem.
- Groups should meet on a regular basis to discuss their poem.
- Roles should rotate after a piece has been discussed.
- Students should use written or drawn notes to capture their thinking and guide their part of the discussion.
- Literature circle meetings should aim to be open, natural discussions about a poem or particular writing.
- The teacher should serve as facilitator, not group member or instructor.
- Assessment is through teacher observation and student self-assessment.

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students should be able to demonstrate competence in the evaluation and discussion of poetry.

Time Considerations

Instructor preparation:
15 minutes
Student activity:
three-five classes

RELATED STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

Language Arts

Standard 5. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process

- generates interesting questions to be answered while reading
- establishes and adjusts purposes for reading
- represents abstract information as explicit mental pictures
- uses specific strategies to clear up confusing parts of a text
- reflects on what has been learned after reading and formulates ideas, opinions, and personal responses to texts

Standard 6. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts

- applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of literary passages and texts
- identifies specific questions of personal importance and seeks to answer them through literature
- understands that people respond differently to literature
- plays a variety of roles in group discussions

Standard 8. Demonstrates competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning

- asks questions to seek elaboration and clarification of ideas
- listens in order to understand a speaker's topic, purpose, and perspective
- conveys a clear main point when speaking to others and stays on the topic being discussed
- presents simple prepared reports to the class

RIVER READING CIRCLE

UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION

In this activity, you will be a part of a reading circle—contributing your ideas and insights about river-related poetry.

LEARN THE LINGO

reading circle

People with common interests come together around the same piece of literature—story, poem, article, or book certain piece of writing—to shape ideas, and listen and respond to others’ opinions in an intelligent way. Each member reads the same text and takes on a specific responsibility in the upcoming discussion. Everyone comes to the group with prepared notes to help perform his/her particular job. The circles have regular meetings with discussion roles rotating each session.

Gather Your Supplies

- river-related poetry
- pen/pencil
- paper

Go Beyond

Create a demonstration board as a sales pitch to other groups to read your river-related poem.

CHART A COURSE FOR EXPLORATION

Before Breaking into Groups

1. Take 10-15 minutes to read through the poems at the end of the activity. Which one moves you, interests you, or do you relate to most?
2. Get together with those people who are interested in the same poem as you.
3. Looking through the list of roles decide which roles will be most important to your group. You must have a Discussion Director, Passage Master, Connector, and Illustrator. Beyond those four roles, it’s up to your group to decide if a Researcher, Summarizer, Word Master, or Scene Setter will be important. Your group may also choose to duplicate roles.

After Breaking into Groups

1. Reread your poem a few times. Find a quiet spot and read it out loud. Take time to study the word choice and the effect the words and the overall poem have on you. Fulfill your responsibility for your reading circle. Take notes and prepare your remarks and contributions.
2. Meet with your circle; use your written or drawn notes to guide your part in the discussion. Remember, circle meetings are free and flexible discussions about the poems. Prepared notes help because they give you something to share with your group.
3. Turn in your prepared remarks and any notes you have taken during circle discussion. As a group, choose another poem and rotate roles.

RIVER READING CIRCLE

CIRCLE MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

Discussion Director	writes open-ended discussion questions that probe the thoughts of others in the group
Passage Master	for a long poem takes the readers back to memorable, important passages of the text and reads them aloud; for short poems, reads the entire poem to the group
Connector	takes everyone from the text-world out into the real-world and connects experiences or ideas from the poem to real-life situations
Illustrator	uses graphics and pictures to illustrates the group's visual (nonverbal) response to the poem
Researcher	researches information on the discussed subjects
Summarizer	uses writing and speaking skills to summarize what was read
Word Master	identifies any difficult or new words from the poem and provides a definition to the other group members
Scene Setter	writes a short description of the main scenes throughout the piece

General Group Discussion Guidelines

- Use active listening skills.
- Do not interrupt the person talking/sharing.
- Use appropriate body management skills.
- Come prepared and ready for the discussion.
- Respect and build upon one another's ideas.

RIVER READING CIRCLE

Your teacher will observe your participation in your reading circles.

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT:	YES	NO	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT
I COMPLETED MY PART OF THE LITERATURE CIRCLE ACTIVITY.			
I COMPLETED MY PART TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY.			
I COMPLETED TO EACH OF THE GROUP DISCUSSIONS.			
I DEMONSTRATED THAT I UNDERSTOOD MY ROLE IN THE ACTIVITY.			
THE GROUP WAS SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE OF MY WORK.			
THERE ARE PARTS OF MY ROLE THAT I COULD HAVE PUT MORE EFFORT INTO.			
I FEEL GOOD ABOUT MY ROLE IN THE LITERATURE CIRCLE ACTIVITY.			

Through my reading and circle discussions, I learned three important concepts or facts:

REFERENCES

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RIVER READING CIRCLE

Selected poems related to the Mississippi River

HIAWATHA'S CHILDHOOD

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

By the shores of Gitche Gumee,
By the shining Big-Sea-Water,
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis,
Daughter of the Moon, Nokomis.
Dark behind it rose the forest,
Rose the black and gloomy pine-trees,
Rose the firs with cones upon them;
Bright before it beat the water,
Beat the clear and sunny water,
Beat the shining Big-Sea-Water.

There the wrinkled old Nokomis
Nursed the little Hiawatha,
Rocked him in his linden cradle,
Bedded soft in moss and rushes,
Safely bound with reindeer sinews;
Stilled his fretful wail by saying,
"Hush, the Naked Bear will hear thee!"
Lulled him into slumber, singing,
"Ewa-yea! my little owlet!
Who is this, that lights the wigwam?
With his great eyes lights the wigwam?
Ewa-yea! my little owlet!"

Many things Nokomis taught him
Of the stars that shine in heaven;
Showed him Ishkoodah, the comet,
Ishkoodah, with fiery tresses,
Showed the Death-Dance of the sprits,
Warriors with their plumes and war-clubs,
Flaring far away to northward
In the frosty nights of winder;
Showed the broad white road in heaven,
Pathway of the ghosts, the shadows,
Running straight across the heavens,
Crowded with the ghosts, the shadows.

At the door on summer evenings,
Sat the little Hiawatha,
Heard the whispering of the pine-trees,
Heard the lapping of the waters,
Sounds of music, words of wonder;
"Minne-wawa!" said the pine-trees,
"Mudway-aushka!" said the water.

Saw the fire-fly Wah-wah-taysee,
Flitting through the dusk of evening,
With the twinkle of its candle
Lighting up the brakes and bushes,
And he sang the song of children,

Sang the song Nokomis taught him:

"Wah-wah-taysee, little fire-fly,
Little flitting, white-fire insect,
Little, dancing, white-fire creature,
Light me with your little candle,
Ere upon my bed I lay me,
Ere in sleep I close my eyelids!"

Saw the moon rise from the water,
Rippling, rounding from the water,
Saw the flecks and shadows on it,
Whispered, "What is that, Nokomis?"
And the good Nokomis answered:
"Once a warrior, very angry,
Seized his grandmother, and threw her
Up into the sky at midnight;
Right against the moon he threw her;
"Tis her body that you see there."

Saw the rainbow in the heaven,
In the eastern sky the rainbow,
Whispered, "What is that, Nokomis?"
And the good Nokomis answered:
"Tis the heaven of flowers you see there;
All the wild-flowers of the forest,
All the lilies of the prairie,
When on earth they fade and perish,
Blossom in that heaven above us."

When he heard the owls at midnight,
Hooting, laughing in the forest,
"What is that?" he cried in terror;
"What is that," he said, "Nokomis?"
And the good Nokomis answered:
"That is but the owl and owlet,
Talking in their native language,
Talking, scolding at each other."

Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How they built their nests in summer,
Where they hid themselves in winter,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Chickens."

Of all beasts he learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How the beavers built their lodges,
Where the squirrels hid their acorns,
How the reindeer ran so swiftly,
Why the rabbit was so timid,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Brothers."

The Song of Hiawatha is based on the legends and stories of many North American Indian tribes, but especially those of the Ojibwe Indians of northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Some tales were collected by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, the renowned historian, pioneer explorer, and geologist. The collection was the inspiration for Longfellow's poem

Vocabulary

Gitche Gu'mee: The Big-Sea-Water, Lake Superior

Nokomis: Hiawatha's Grandmother

Ewa-yea: lullaby

Iahkoodah': fire, a comet

Minne-wa'wa: a pleasant sound, as of the wind in the trees

Mudway: aushka

Wah-wah-tay'see: the fire-fly

Opechee: the robin

Owais'sa: the blue-bird

Adjidau'mo: the red squirrel

Soan-ge-ta'ha: strong-hearted

Mahn-go-taysee: loon-heart

Mississippi
River
language arts

RIVER READING CIRCLE

Selected poems related to the Mississippi River

IN THE DELTA

By William Alexander Percy

The river country's wide and flat
And blurred ash-blue with sun,
And there all work is dreams come true,
All dreams are work begun.

The silted river made for us
The black and mellow soil
And taught us as we conquered him
Courage and faith and toil.

The river town that water oaks
And myrtles hide and bless
Has broken every law except
The law of kindness.

And north and south and east the fields
Of cotton close it round,
Where golden billows of the sun
Break with no shade or sound.

Dear is the town, but in the fields
A little house could be,
If built with care and auspices,
A heart's felicity.

O friend, who love not much indoors
Or lamp-lit, people ways,
What of a field and house to pass
Our residue of days?

We'd learn of fret and labor there
A patience that we miss
And be content content to be
Nor wish nor hope for bliss.

With the immense untrammelled sun
For brother in the fields,
And every night the stars' crusade
Flashing to us their shields,

We'd meet, perhaps, some dusk as we
Turned home to well-earned rest,
Unhurried Wisdom, tender-eyed,
A pilgrim and our guest.

WALLEYES

By Gary Holthaus

Setting out to fish
I row in the sunlight
across the Mississippi.

Close to Wisconsin
a swifter current runs
and hawks us down against our will,
willows sweeping by,
boats swinging stern to.

Rowing the skin off my palms
I snip an oar to look at hand,
double it into a fist
and press it between my knees,
unable to believe the power
of this race that holds us,
and then, believing, row more;
remember the locks and dam below,
their silver rollers chewing the river
and row more, til, as if set free
by kidnappers, we slip out
into the ship's channel
but far down.

Then have to pull again
against the whole Mississippi
until we are back on the Iowa side
without ever wetting the line
or catching a single wide-eyed pike,
emptier handed than I've ever been
on this whole river,
huge moon rising from Wisconsin
lighting the current behind us
as we haul up and over
the wet planks
and flap ourselves down
like unstrung carp
on the dock
at Guttenberg.

RIVER READING CIRCLE

Selected poems related to the Mississippi River

WHO OWNS THE MISSISSIPPI?

Anonymous
(first printed in America Lumberman,
October 12, 1912)

The river belongs to the nation,
The levee, they say, to the state;
The government runs the navigation,
The commonwealth, though, pays the freight.

Now, here is the problem that's heavy—
Please, which is right or the wrong?—
When the water runs over the levee,
To whom does the river belong?

It's the government's river in summer
When the stage of the water is low,
But in Spring when it gets on a hummer
And starts o'er the levee to flow;
When the river gets suddenly dippy
The state must dig down in it till
And push back the old Mississippi
Away from the farm and the mill.

I know very little of lawing,
I've made little study in courts,
I've done little geeing and hawing
Through verdicts, opinions, reports;
Why need there be anything more said
When the river starts levees to climb?
If the government owns the aforesaid
It must own it all of the time.

If the bull you are leading should bellow
And jump over somebody's fence,
There isn't much doubt you're the fellow
Expected to bear the expense;
If it follows a Sunday school teacher
And chases the maid up a tree,
You're the owner the same of the creature
Undoubtedly all will agree.

If some time should somebody's chickens
Get into your garden and dig
And pull up the plants like the dickens,
Or somebody's bull or pup or pig,
The owner thereof cannot blame it
On you or some party remote;

The owner thereof can't disclaim it
The chick or pup or the shoat.

If it's your Mississippi in dry time,
It's yours, Uncle Sam, when it's wet;
If it's your Mississippi in fly time,
In flood time it's your river yet.
There's no other way you can make it,
And so, when I give the alarm,
Come and get your darned river and take it
Away from my timber and farm!

RIVER ROADS

By Carl Sandburg

Let the crows go by hawking their caw
and caw.
They have been swimming in the
midnights of coal mines somewhere.
Let 'em hawk their caw and caw.

Let the woodpecker drum and drum
on a hickory stump.
He has been swimming in red and blue
pools somewhere hundreds of years
And the blue has gone to his wings
and the red has gone to his head.
Let his red head drum and drum.

Let the dark pools hold the birds in a
looking-glass.
And if the pool wishes, let it shiver to
the blur of many wings, old swimmers
from old places.

Let the redwing streak a line of
vermillion on the green wood lines.
And the mist along the river fix its
purple in lines of a woman's shawl on
lazy shoulders.

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THE ROCK CRIES OUT TO US TODAY

By Maya Angelou

A Rock, A River, A Tree

Hosts to species long since departed,
Mark the mastodon.

The dinosaur, who left dry tokens
Of their sojourn here
On our planet floor,
Any broad alarm of their hastening
doom
Is lost in the gloom of dust and ages.

But today, the Rock cries out to us,
clearly, forcefully,
Come, you may stand upon my
Back and face your distant destiny,
But seek no haven in my shadow.
I will give you no hiding place
down here.

You, created only a little lower than
The angels, have crouched too long in
The bruising darkness,
Have lain too long
Face down in ignorance.
Your mouths spelling words
Armed for slaughter.

The rock cries out today,
you may stand on me,
But do not hide your face.

Across the wall of the world,
A river sings a beautiful song,
Come rest here by my side.

Each of you a bordered country,
Delicate and strangely made proud,
Yet thrusting perpetually under siege.
Your armed struggles for profit
Have left collars of waste upon
My shore, currents of debris upon
my breast.
Yet, today I call you to my riverside,
If you will study war no more.

Come, clad in peace and I will sing
the songs
The Creator gave to me when I

And the tree and stone were one.
Before cynicism was a bloody sear
across your brow
And when you yet knew you still
knew nothing.
The river sings and sings on.

There is a true yearning to respond to
The singing river and the wise rock.
So say the Asian, the Hispanic,
the Jew,
The African and Native American,
the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French,
the Greek,
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest,
the Sheikh,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless,
the teacher.
They hear. They all hear
The speaking of the tree.

Today, the first and last of every tree
Speaks to humankind.
Come to me, here beside the River.
Plant yourself beside me, here beside
the River.

Each of you, descendant of some
passed-
On traveler, has been paid for.
You, who gave me my first name,
You Pawnee, Apache and Seneca,
You Cherokee Nation, who rested
with me,
Then forced on bloody feet,
Left me to the employment of other
seekers—
Desperate for gain, starving for gold.

You, the Turk, the Swede, the German,
the Scot,
The Italian, the Hungarian, the Pole,
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru,
Bought, sold, stolen, arriving on a
nightmare
Praying for a dream.

Here, root yourselves beside me.
I am the tree planted by the river,
Which will not be moved.
I, the rock, I the river, I the tree

I am yours—your passages have
been paid.

Lift up your faces, you have a
piercing need
For this bright morning dawning
for you.

History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be un-lived, and if faced
with courage,
Need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes
Upon this day breaking for you.
Give birth again
To the dream.

Women, children, men,
Take it into the palms of your
hands.
Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.
Lift up your hearts.
Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings.
Do not be wedded forever
To fear, yoked eternally
To brutishness.

The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new
steps of change.
Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage
To look up and out upon me,
The rock, the river, the tree, your
country.
No less to Midas than the mendicant.
No less to you now than the
mastodon then.

Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up
and out
And into your sister's eyes,
Into your brother's face, your
country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.

Mississippi
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