

My Literary Circus: Fostering Reading and Writing in Public School

Bob Doherty

Synopsis

The teacher who wants to be inspired by ideas, not handed a cookie-cutter recipe for instruction, will enjoy this article.

The article describes the language arts classroom of a teacher who became inspired by some of the pioneers of the process approach to teaching, reading and writing, among them Nancie Atwell and Jerome Harste. The teacher, Bob Doherty, has spent thirty years innovating and experimenting with methods, strategies, and activities aimed at engaging young people in the use of language. His belief is that if kids are genuinely engaged in reading and writing, they will improve as readers and writers; therefore, the preponderance of a teacher's time should be spent not in the more common practices of isolating, teaching, assessing, and documenting skills, but in creating activities that are fun and exciting and that immerse students in real language experiences. Hence the title, *My Literary Circus: Fostering Reading and Writing in Middle School*.

The piece describes a classroom theater in which kids share writing and other talents, a classroom economy, methods of discipline, novel studies, and group activities. The writer uses narrative, anecdote, dialogue, and description to bring these activities to life for the reader.