

Designing Effective Projects: Teaching Thinking Assessing Thinking in a 6-8 Classroom

Assessing Thinking: Grades 6-8

In [Literature e-Circles](#), students in different middle schools read the novel *Holes* by Louis Sachar, and meet in virtual literature circles (or “e-circles”) to discuss their interpretations of the novel. Comprehension questions and a modified Socratic discussion method promote deep thinking about characterization, plot, style, author intent, and personal interpretation. Students meet face-to-face to create technology-supported projects that demonstrate their understanding and appreciation of the text.

Assessing Process

Asking questions is an important thinking skill. The following anecdotal comments describe the kinds of questions asked by students in oral and electronic discussions.

Student	Date	Notes
Amanda	10/15	<i>Holes</i> —2 questions to clear up confusion about plot
	10/30	<i>Holes</i> —Question about character’s motive
	11/10	<i>Holes</i> —Question comparing her experiences to Stanley’s

Assessing Product

The following rubric is used to evaluate the quality of thinking that is reflected in the final project for this unit.

Holes Project Evaluation Rubric

Content	4	3	2	1
Identification of theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies an important and relevant theme that is carefully supported with several specific instances in the book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies a reasonable theme that is supported by specific instances in the book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies a superficial theme that may be supported by few instances in the book 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to identify a theme that is supported by the book
Connections between book’s theme and different perspectives from real life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thoughtfully illustrates the complexity of the theme by making logical and accurate connections with real-life examples from different points of view Makes an important conclusion about the theme that applies to the reader’s life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrates the theme with several relevant real-life examples Makes a logical conclusion about the theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partially illustrates the theme with few real-life examples Attempts to make a conclusion about the theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inaccurately illustrates the theme with irrelevant examples Fails to draw a conclusion about the theme

Self-Assessment

During independent reading, students write responses to the text on sticky notes. After reading a scheduled number of pages, they record and expand their notes in their journal and write a response to the prompt for that day's e-circle. This entry serves as the "ticket" into the ongoing e-circle discussion. Use the independent reading-responding time to meet with individuals or small groups who need extra support. To encourage steady reading effort, record the number of pages the class has read at the end of each period. Seeing the number of pages grow on a "Class Reading Progress" chart can be motivating. Every three days, ask students to select their best notes, write a reflection about the strategies they used, and turn them in for assessment.