

TEACHER OVERVIEW

Research has shown that children gain greater understanding of what they have read when they are given frequent opportunities to respond to what they've read, especially through writing. The writing response, in turn, helps to develop the students' critical reading and thinking skills. And so the cycle goes—children who read, write better; children who write, read more. This reading-writing link is the very heart of the Letters about Literature (LAL) program.

Readers enter LAL by writing a letter to an author—living or dead—explaining how that author's work somehow changed the reader's view of the world or self. The program has three competition levels: Level I, grades 4 - 6; Level II, grades 7 - 8; and Level III, grades 9 - 12. This educational supplement provides classroom activities and black line masters to assist teachers in guiding their students through the book discussion and writing process. The unit has four lessons that take readers from prewriting discussions through writing and finally assessment.

They are:

Lesson 1: Focus. Introduces readers to the concept that books can change lives

Lesson 2: Inquiry. Provides activities to help readers explore the unique relationship between themselves, an author, and a book.

Lesson 3: Application. Provides writing tips to help readers shape their letters.

Lesson 4: Assessment. Provides a checklist for editing and rewriting their letters.

Each black line master that accompanies the lessons are recommended for one or more of the three competition levels. However, teachers should feel free to adapt the materials to fit the specific needs of their students. Depending on the group and how much work is completed during class time, the lessons—including the writing of the letters—may require five to ten 45-minute sessions.

NCTE AND IRA STANDARDS

Thousands of teachers have found LAL a valuable classroom project. Each year, the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress receives hundreds of letters from teachers testifying how the program's theme and guidelines dovetail with state standards for language arts.

Listed below are the standards recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association which apply to the LAL program and recommended teaching activities included in this educational supplement:

Students will

- apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate texts.
- adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language for a variety of audiences and purposes.
- employ a wide range of writing strategies.
- apply knowledge of language structure, conventions.
- participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

NOTE: Refer to "LAL Reproducibles" file (Part 2) for the blackline masters to accompany these lessons.

