



## Diane Titcher Journal

*From Page 219*

### Second round of book club meetings

*As she conducted a Literature Circle inquiry with her class, Diane kept an informal email journal which she shared with Smokey weekly. To read Diane's journal in its entirety, [click here](#). To read a specific excerpt which links directly to the chapter, [read on](#).*

### WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26

Our 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting day. Each group had read just over half of their book at a minimum. Before getting into their groups to meet, I asked the kids to each write me a letter, using some of the suggestions I had given them the previous week as a prompt:

- What kind of person do you think the main character is? Why?
- What do you think/feel about what's happened in your story so far? Why?
- Thinking about yourself as a reader, what challenges have you faced when reading your book?

I told the kids when they finished their letter to quietly take it to their meeting area, along with their book and wait for the rest of their group members. While they were waiting they could read. There were now three kids who had finished their book, so I reminded them to go back through the last chapter their group had agreed to read so they would know what events were okay to discuss, and which events had not yet happened for the rest of their group members. Some of the kids took the letter writing very seriously, so it took about 10 minutes for all the groups to have everyone together. I told the class they had a few options:

- Use their letters as the basis for beginning a discussion
- Use any burning questions they had to begin a discussion
- Discuss difficult/confusing parts of the book
- Discuss big ideas they had while reading—using their thinknotes as a reference.
- Continue a discussion they had started previously but not finished.

The discussions today went so much better! I had a parent helper in, so I felt more confident that between the two of us, we could provide support where needed and be sure the groups were all on task. (I have three parents who have been helping during my reading time for several months. They have spent many of their days sitting and observing strategy lessons, and helping the kids learn to be aware of and track their thinking. Now the payoff has come, as they can jump right in with the book club



groups, understand where their thinking is coming from, and probe them to think deeper, using the strategies we've learned. What a gift that's been for me and the kids!)

All groups were engaged in on-task discussion. I found as I visited the groups that I needed to throw out fewer questions for them and could be more of an observer. The Indian Captive group seemed most hesitant when I stopped by, but Rachael made a very thoughtful comment about Molly learning the Indian language, but things getting harder for her as a result. I asked her why she said that and she thought for a minute and said she wasn't really sure. I asked the girls to think about that, go back into the text if they needed to and see if they could figure it out. When I wasn't with them, they were still talking and I could hear that were on task when I listened in. They also came up with some good thoughts about the issue Rachael raised, primarily that it made her more like the Indians and she didn't want to be like them. Both my parent helper and I had an overhead transparency on a clipboard with +, quotes, - columns. Here are the notes we made:

**IN THE + COLUMN:**

- Abbey (Indian Captive) and Jessi (My Heart Is On the Ground) were both looking back in the text for evidence to support their thinking while they were writing their letters to me.
- The Crooked River group had a great conversation going about who killed Ten Claws. There were different opinions and they allowed each group member to express their thinking. Ultimately they went back to the text to resolve the issue.
- My Heart Is On the Ground group— Individual raised a question and the group members helped her understand character's traits by finding text in the book. This type of group cooperation and using the text happened several times.

**IN THE QUOTES COLUMN:**

- Dylan (*Blood on the River*): "John was right at our last meeting. They are trespassing 'cuz they're in the Powhatan Empire."
- Rachael (*Indian Captive*): "When she learned to speak their language, things got worse for her."
- Logan (Crooked River): "It's like black people – they don't like them because of their skin color." Then Hannah L. added, "or because their culture is different."
- Gavin (Sign of the Beaver): "Does anyone have any new questions?"

**IN THE-COLUMN:**

- One group spent too much time worrying about someone paying bucks they owed for breaking a group rule. (I intervened with this group and reminded them that they didn't want to waste their discussion time worrying about that. They all knew he owed the bucks and could make sure he paid them at the end of the discussion time. They readily agreed to that and got back to discussing their book.)
- Note passing not related the Book Club discussion. (Even after trying to harness that desire to pass notes, it still goes on! )

At the end of the day I asked kids how they felt it went today—they responded enthusiastically with, “Good!” “Great!” “I like this!” I asked if they felt they were learning new things about their book by talking about it with their classmates and almost all of the kids said yes, some resoundingly so. The best part of all—the bell rang and no one noticed—every group was engaged in discussion about their book and no one even looked up when the bell rang! (This included my kids who are the “clock watchers” for the last four or five minutes of class everyday – reminding me that the bell is about to ring.) I was on cloud nine! Unlike last week when I went home wondering if I had any clue at all about what I was doing, today became one of those, “This is why I teach!” days.

Note: I took their letters home and wrote a response to each of them over the next few days. I asked them to respond back to me on Monday, March 31, and then I responded back to them again. On April 2, I gave them my responses and let them decide whether to respond to me or not. About half a dozen kids did write me back, (I made a point of somewhat loudly thanking them as they turned their letters into me) and I will give them my responses when we return from break. I can't wait to share these with you—I LOVE not only the exchanges we've had, but the fantastic thinking the kids are able to put into writing to share with me.