One of my goals for my reading block this year was to help my fourth grade students LOVE reading. Not just become a better reader, but become a reader who enjoyed their time spent with books and applied their reading skills to a variety of texts with ease. I was drawn to literature circles because they allowed the students to pick a book that truly sparked their interest. It gave my students the ability to teach and learn from each other, and provided a daily opportunity for integrated practice of all of their reading strategies.

The implementation of literature circles proved more challenging than I thought. On my first attempt, I thought I had done everything I could to scaffold the circles for my students. We had question stems, talk cards, dry erase bookmarks to record our thinking, and a comfy space for the circles to meet in. The circles launched with a pinterest worthy book tasting where each student ranked their book preferences. I felt we were set up to succeed and could not wait to see the growth that came from our literature circles. Once we got rolling however, I realized it was too much too soon. Even with talk cards, we were not ready to discuss our reading in depth. I needed to teach them how to use the skills and strategies I was so excited for them to integrate, and then show them how to turn those skills into productive conversation. So we laid our dry erase bookmarks aside for the moment, and went back to the drawing board.

Once I realized the growth that was needed before the lit circles could truly be successful, I looked at our standards map for the year and decided to revisit our literature circles after Thanksgiving Break. This time around, we voted on a book
to read as a class. The students read the book in partners, then we discussed it
together as a class. I was able to model how to use the talk cards in conversation
and my students were able to emulate that skill with each other. Reading the same
book together was great for our classroom community. The story gave them all
something in common and became a topic of reference throughout our day. We
repeated this read aloud- lit circle hybrid structure again after winter break.
Unfortunately, just as we were gearing up our more independent, traditional style
literature circles, the schools were closed.

Some of the major successes I saw throughout the plan’s implementation
was a boost in engagement. Because the students were invested in the story, they
were also more invested in the reading block. The book gave them a reason to want
to become better readers. I also loved the way it transformed the way they spoke to
each other. Even outside of book discussion, the expectations of being respectful of
another’s ideas when contributing your own affected the way they played together.
I loved how they picked characters from the story to role play at recess and made
meaningful connections to the characters in their everyday life.

A major challenge we faced when implementing literature circles was how
to differentiate the literate circle expectations so everyone could be included,
without leveling the groups. One easy solution was to install a text reader on the
students chromebooks and give them a digital copy of the book. This allowed all of
my students to access the text independently and bring their own unique
perspective to our conversation.

Next year, I plan to start with the whole group model at the beginning, in
order to model the level of conversation expected from a literature circle. This year
I definitely gave my students too much too quickly, and slowing down the process
will allow them to grow comfortable with the literature circle process.