

Read-Around-Groups: A Structured Cooperative Learning Activity that Really Works!

by
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Read-Around-Groups (RAGs) are a fantastic way to get students to read a lot of papers in a short amount of time. Teachers love it because they are so productive. Students love it because they can't believe time is passing so quickly. Principals love it because it's group work, but it's also very quiet! The steps are simple:

- 1) Papers should not have student names on them but the last 4 digits of a phone number or SSN.
- 2) Put students in groups of four or five (as nearly equal as possible). For this variation, the groups should not be made up of one high, one low, and two middle ability students; instead, the groups should be as homogeneous as possible.
- 3) Assign one student as a passer and one as a recorder.
- 4) The passer collects the papers and passes them to the next group (the direction should be pre-determined by the teacher).
- 5) Students each take a paper and read it. The teacher determines amount of time for reading depending on average length of papers and student reading levels. This is a quick read, not a leisurely nor a critical read. The teacher should make sure students are not finishing and sitting for a long time before passing their papers.
- 6) At the teacher's signal, all students pass to the right (even if not finished). Do this until everyone in the group has read every paper. The students should not pass their papers until the teacher gives the signal ("pass to the right").
- 7) Each group discusses the papers they just read and choose their favorite. The recorder writes down the number of the paper that everyone agrees is the best. This can take some convincing.
- 8) The teacher tells the passer to collect the papers and pass them to the next group.
- 9) Follow this process until all papers have been read by all groups.
- 10) When the papers get back to the writers, students should get their own papers. The students should be directed to pass to the right and read the papers. The students should not pick the best paper out of that group.
- 11) The teacher asks students to share their favorites. On the board, the teacher lists the #s chosen as best by each group. If the groups have been well-selected, then many students will have been chosen – usually more than half.
- 12) The teacher should ask students to explain what made the "best" papers the best. List on the board or overhead the qualities students liked about their "best" papers.
- 13) Writers selected as "best" can read their papers to the class, or this can all be kept anonymous.
- 14) The teacher should encourage students to go back and revise their papers given what they learned by reading everyone else's paper.

There are many ways to use RAGs. They can be adapted to focused readings, especially for revising or editing. Some variations are listed below:

- Focus on SOL domains. Have students rate just for composing, or written expression, or usage/mechanics.

- Use this as part of responding (prior to revising). Have students circle effective verbs, underline weak verbs, put in stars where dialogue could be added, and put in check marks where details could be added. Do this per group rather than per student so that several students are looking for places to improve (as one reader might not catch everything).
- Use this as part of peer editing. On the first read, have students mark spelling. On the second, have them mark punctuation, etc. Again, do one topic (for instance, spelling) per group rather than per student so that you have several students looking for mistakes.

I first learned of RAGs from Rosie Wyson, Florida Writing Project and can't imagine teaching without this activity. Once you've used RAGs, you'll be hooked too!