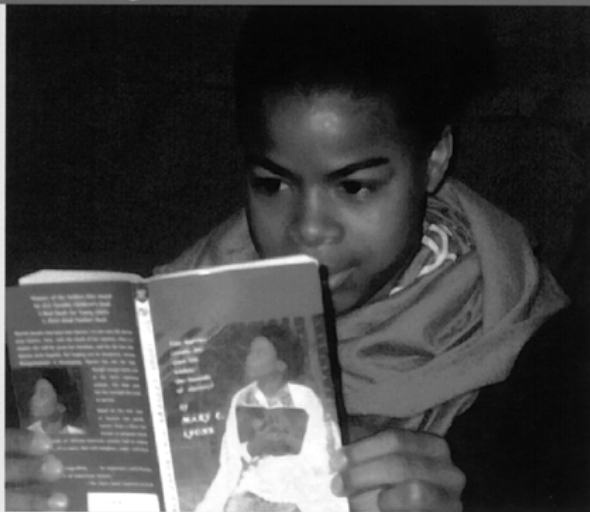


# STUDY GUIDE

## Are They *Really* Reading?

Expanding SSR in the Middle Grades



JODI CRUM MARSHALL

*Foreword by Janet Allen*

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# Are They Really Reading?

## *Expanding SSR in the Middle Grades*

Jodi Crum Marshall

This guide will assist study groups in thinking about how they might make changes to their sustained silent reading program, as well as plan for a schoolwide sustained literacy period. To spark this thinking you will find Key Questions for Group Discussion, and Quotes to Ponder from each chapter.

Also included are two workshops, which serve to extend the ideas in the book. The first workshop involves helping students learn how to have effective peer conferences during reading. The second workshop is a book pass activity that asks participants to analyze and rate different read-aloud texts.

### **Helpful Hints for All Group Discussions and Activities**

1. If discussion stalls or digresses into a local issue or school problem unrelated to the book, you can refocus the group by introducing a key question or by having everyone consider one of the Quotes to Ponder.
2. If a workshop requires participants to have their students complete an assignment, you may want to distribute any needed materials in advance, with target dates for completion before each workshop.
3. You may want to rotate responsibility for leading whole-group or small-group discussions to ensure that everyone has a turn leading and invests equally in the group.

## **Chapter 1: *Are They Really Reading During SSR?***

### **Key Questions for Group Discussion**

In this chapter, Jodi talks about how she saw her sustained silent reading program become less effective than it should have been. Think about a time when you realized some aspect of your curriculum wasn't working. How did

you come to that realization? How did you change your teaching? What connections can you make between that experience and the experiences Jodi shares in this chapter?

### **Quote to Ponder**

*I do think teachers should read during a silent reading period, but I do not think you can start that way on the first day. There is no way to help the students choose the right book, watch them choose books, observe their behaviors, talk with them about what they are reading, read to them, or listen to them read if you are at your desk behind a book. (p. 8)*

## **Chapter 2: Using Classroom Conversations to Guide Change**

### **Key Questions for Group Discussion**

Chapter 2 chronicles how Jodi used student surveys, parent surveys, and observations to make changes to her sustained silent reading program. Talk about whether group members use surveys or observations to gather information. If yes, what methods are most effective? How is this information used? What gets in the way of gathering information from parents and students? How might these obstacles be overcome?

### **Quote to Ponder**

*If you have students who are always conveniently being sent to the principal's office at the exact time your reading period takes place, you can bet they are "avoiders." You need to capture the interest of these students while they are in your class so they won't want to leave. (p. 21)*

## **Chapter 3: Building a Literate Classroom Environment**

### **Key Questions for Group Discussion**

Teachers struggle with the cost and logistics of organizing a classroom library—how to gather enough of the right books, how to store them, how to

keep track of their whereabouts, and so on. What are some practical tips Jodi suggests you might use in your teaching to build a literate environment? What are some strategies you currently use to find books and organize your classroom library?

### **Quote to Ponder**

*It isn't enough to have a wealth of books; you need to make sure you have the right books. How do you know which books will hook the students in your classroom? The best way, as I have said before, is by getting to know your students.*  
(p. 40)

## **Chapter 4: The Teacher's Role: Leading and Assessing SSL**

### **Key Questions for Group Discussion**

How can sustained silent literacy be assessed? Should it be assessed? What are some evaluation strategies Jodi describes that you might use in your classroom or schoolwide?

### **Quote to Ponder**

*I believe you should think of your classroom as a giant book club. If you have ever been a part of a successful book club, you already know the key elements. The best book clubs are filled with people who love to read, people who get excited about a story, who cry over a poem, who laugh out loud when reading.*  
(p. 55)

## **Chapter 5: Reflect, Revise, and Analyze**

### **Key Questions for Group Discussion**

What are some strategies Jodi uses to help students find books they might enjoy? Which of these strategies might you try in your own classroom? How can you help students have deeper, more meaningful conversations about the book choices they make?

## Quote to Ponder

*To get students involved in sharing their books at the end of the period, I have started discussing the books I am reading. If I speak first, and talk for just a minute or two, students see that talking about what they are reading is not so difficult, and they start to volunteer themselves. (p. 69)*

## Chapter 6: Promoting Literacy Beyond the Classroom

### Key Questions for Group Discussion

What are some of the benefits of having a schoolwide SSL period? What are some of the drawbacks? What are some of the obstacles you will face as you make changes to your literacy program? What are some ways you might overcome these obstacles? What reading levels are represented in your school? What materials will you need to meet the needs of your students?

## Quote to Ponder

*Haven't you, at one time or another, listened to something being read aloud, only to realize you can't remember a thing about it once it's completed? Your students will get distracted, too. Therefore it is important to select short, interesting pieces to read aloud. (p. 78)*

## Chapter 7: Frequently Asked Questions on Maintaining SSL

### Key Questions for Group Discussion

What questions were answered for you in this chapter? What issues will you still need to address before making changes in your sustained silent reading program? How could your colleagues help you address these issues? How could administration help you?

## Quote to Ponder

*Children need to see, hear and experience the value of reading. They need to be given time to read, a variety of materials to choose from, a schedule that is*

*intellectually stimulating rather than boring, the opportunity to respond to what they read, and the exposure to fluent reading. (p. 106)*

## ***Workshops***

### **1.**

Distribute copies of Figure 1: Peer Conference Questions for Independent Reading to each participant. Have everyone make copies of this form to give to students to try in peer conferences. Bring the completed forms to your next study-group meeting. What patterns do you notice in the responses? How will you use what you learned from this activity to refine your sustained silent literacy period?

### **2.**

Bring in an assortment of read-aloud selections or ask participants to bring some from their own classrooms (see pages 144–146 of *Are They Really Reading?* for examples). Distribute copies of Figure 2: Read-Aloud Possibilities. Then have a book pass; everyone should sit in a circle and pass around the read-aloud selections. After spending a few minutes looking at each selection, have participants read a few pages and complete the handout. Discuss which read-alouds received the highest ratings and any variations in favorites. Have participants consider how their choices might differ from their students' and why.

Figure 1

### **Peer Conference Questions for Independent Reading**

1. Is your book really good? What makes it good?
2. What is it about (plot)? What is the main point (theme)?
3. What kind of book is it (genre)? Is it fiction or nonfiction?
4. Who are some of the characters? Who is the main character?
5. Do you understand all of it? Is it too easy or too hard?
6. Where does it take place?
7. Who is the author?
8. How did you choose this book?
9. Will you keep reading it? Why or why not?

