Strengthening a Culture of Literacy amongst Rural Guatemalan Youth through the Creation and Application of Literature Circles

Presented by Amanda Flayer, Puerta Abierta founder/director

Rural schools in Guatemala function with the bare necessities...a chalkboard, wooden desks, miniature chairs and dusty shelves. School supplies are scarce and books are nearly non-existent. For those students who are lucky enough to attend public school in rural Guatemala, most will learn to read. However, very few will embrace the pleasure of having adventures in reading. Even fewer will be encouraged to develop their critical thinking and comprehension skills through literature.

The Puerta Abierta's reading circle program offers a safe place for preteens and teenagers to come together and discuss a book that they are reading as a group. With time and guidance, our teens develop skills to think critically about the literature they are reading and to relate books to their own lives.

The reading circle model allows for individual students in a group to each have a loaned copy of the same title of a novel and to read the book together, while accompanied by a trained, adult mentor. Students have the opportunity to communally discuss literature, delve deeper into understanding the story, explore literary terms, expand vocabulary, create community, and build confidence in speaking in public.

The books chosen for the reading circles are determined by cultural relevance, grade level appropriateness and interest.

“When I visited la Puerta Abierta School in Guatemala, I encountered one of the most beautiful school projects and one of the most powerful reading programs I have ever seen.” --Yuyi Morales