

Introduction

The Great Books Foundation provides strong, inquiry-based language arts programs for grades K–12 that improve students’ achievement in reading comprehension, critical thinking, writing, and speaking and listening. Great Books programs combine classroom materials and the Shared Inquiry™ method of learning to provide the essential elements students need to meet and surpass the goals of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

The common standards grew out of an extended effort to develop national standards that would ensure that all students are “college and career ready” in literacy when they complete high school. The grade-specific standards are based on these broad “anchor standards.” The following chart compares the anchor standards for English language arts with

the characteristics of Great Books programs. For the complete common core standards, visit www.corestandards.org.

Both Great Books programs and the common standards share the goal of helping students master the skills and capacities of the literate individual. As articulated in the introduction to the common language arts standards, such students:

- Demonstrate independence as readers, thinkers, writers, speakers, and listeners
- Build strong content knowledge
- Respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline
- Comprehend as well as critique
- Value evidence
- Understand other perspectives and cultures

Reading

Common Standards

Key Ideas and Details

Students should be able to:

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and make logical inferences from it
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas

Great Books Programs

Great Books programs use thematically rich, diverse literature from renowned authors. Interpretive activities accompany each reading selection to build strong reading and analytic skills that can reach across all disciplines. Students learn to:

- Strategically read and annotate a text
- Generate ideas about the meaning of a text
- Infer, evaluate, and revise ideas
- Support and summarize arguments with reasoning and evidence

For more information about Great Books programs, contact the sales representative for your state at 800.222.5870 or visit www.greatbooks.org.

Reading, continued

Common Standards

Great Books Programs

Craft and Structure

Students should be able to:

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text; determine technical, connotative, and figurative meanings; and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone
- Analyze the structure of a text and understand how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole

Through multiple readings, students analyze a text to examine how key words, phrases, and passages affect meaning. The combination of high-quality literature, Shared Inquiry discussion, and interpretive activities helps students discover how parts of a text relate to the whole to create a deeper understanding of the text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Students should be able to:

- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or compare the approaches the authors take

Through Shared Inquiry students:

- Interpret the meaning of a text, taking into consideration the ideas of others to gain deeper insight
- Develop, articulate, and support their own ideas stating them clearly and fully
- Agree and disagree constructively

Cross-text activities provide students with opportunities to compare and contrast multiple texts, both thematically and stylistically.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Students should be able to read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Great Books Programs use high-quality, age-appropriate fiction and nonfiction, selected to challenge the reader and spark rigorous discussion. Great Books literary selections require multiple readings to uncover layers of meaning. These complex texts stimulate thought-provoking interpretive questions to sustain Shared Inquiry discussion.

Writing

Text Types and Purposes

Students should be able to:

- Write arguments to support claims and analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content

Great Books programs integrate writing with reading and discussion. Instructional activities and materials focus on how to write well-organized expository, creative, and interpretive essays. Writing is integrated throughout the program as a tool for thinking. Activities include:

- Writing notes, responses, and questions to spark original thinking
- Taking guided notes to develop a personal response to literature
- Stating, supporting, and modifying a thesis in writing

Writing, continued

Common Standards

Great Books Programs

Production and Distribution of Writing

Students should be able to:

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach

Great Books writing activities focus on the development, organization, and clear articulation of ideas consistent with purpose and audience. Writing activities rely on modeling, guided practice, and use of templates to organize thinking. Students edit and revise their writing with the help of peer reviews and rubrics.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Students should be able to:

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism

Students have opportunities to research background questions related to readings. Suggestions for related projects encourage students to use a range of print and digital sources to investigate topics and themes.

Range of Writing

Students should be able to write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Writing is integrated throughout each Great Books unit as students write questions, make notes on interpretive issues, respond to interpretive questions before and after Shared Inquiry, and write expository, creative, or evaluative essays. Writing activities take place over a range of time frames.

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

Students should be able to:

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric

Conversation and collaboration is integral to all interpretive activities in the Great Books program. In Shared Inquiry discussion students experience the power of language to communicate complex ideas, persuade others, and provoke thought. Students learn to work confidently in a group as they:

- Develop, articulate, and support interpretations
- Explain and defend concepts and ideas
- Listen attentively
- Agree and disagree with others constructively
- Synthesize and build on others' ideas

Speaking and Listening, continued

Common Standards

Great Books Programs

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Students should be able to present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

In Shared Inquiry discussion and in other Great Books activities students learn to organize, explain, and support their ideas. The text selections and interpretive activities engage students in thoughtful exploration and exchange of complex ideas. A variety of rubrics provide criteria for personal, peer, and teacher assessments.

Language

Conventions of Standard English

Students should be able to demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Great Books programs provide students with opportunities to demonstrate command of English grammar and usage as they analyze, discuss, and write about challenging literature.

Knowledge of Language

Students should be able to apply knowledge of language to understand how it functions in different contexts, so that they can make effective choices for meaning or style and comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Students analyze texts, examining the subtleties of how language affects meaning or style. Students learn the impact of specific words and details and focus on specific sentences and passages to comprehend more fully.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Students should be able to determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Vocabulary is acquired and used throughout the interpretive activities; specific vocabulary activities teach students to:

- Comprehend through context clues
- Understand word parts and multiple-meaning words
- Understand figures of speech
- Consult reference materials

Great Books Program of Professional Development

The Great Books Program of Professional Development offers concrete, step-by-step instruction in how to use the Shared Inquiry method with Great Books materials. Teachers develop skills to help students become critical readers, thinkers, and writers. Course participants discover how and why students learn through the Shared Inquiry method. Course participants also learn to:

- Implement the Shared Inquiry method to improve reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills
- Practice the facilitative stance of the leader in Shared Inquiry discussion
- Use questioning strategies and interpretive activities to support deeper thinking and comprehension
- Integrate writing into the reading process
- Use Shared Inquiry strategies with a variety of challenging texts across the curriculum

The Great Books Foundation also offers a variety of customized courses and consultation services.

Recognized as
effective by the
National Staff
Development Council