

Helping Middle and High School Students Develop Expository Essays

The Great Books interpretive activities described in your Course 103 materials offer you and your students opportunities to engage in the writing process. Below are suggestions for using the activities to help students write essays answering their own interpretive questions. (*The Reader Writes*, a writing companion to Junior Great Books Series 7, offers additional writing resources.)

FIRST READING

1. Let students know that they will be writing an essay that responds to a question that they develop about the selection. As they read, students should make a note of anything they find confusing, unusual, or interesting.
2. Consider explaining the rubric you will use to assess your students' essays.

SHARING QUESTIONS

Students are more invested in writing when they write about topics of interest to them. Help students develop a question that is:

- ◆ Interpretive, in that it can be answered more than one way based on evidence from the selection
- ◆ Compelling to them
- ◆ Addressed in several passages throughout the selection

SECOND READING

Sustained interaction with the text will help students generate more thoughtful writing. During the second reading activity, students can focus on a particular theme or idea and find evidence to include in their essays.

1. Ask students to reread the selection with their question in mind, identifying important passages that relate to it.
2. Have students share their questions and responses in small groups; group students with others working with the same or similar questions
3. Help students revise their questions as needed.

SHARED INQUIRY DISCUSSION

Small-group work and Shared Inquiry discussion help students see how other readers understand and interpret the text. The following suggestions may help students find and explore topics that interest them:

- ◆ Consider holding two or three short discussions and letting students choose which question to write about.
- ◆ Encourage students to take notes during the discussion and to jot down ideas and questions that pertain to their topic.
- ◆ After the discussion, ask students to write down ideas and questions that arose during discussion that will help them with their essays.

POSTDISCUSSION

Developing Ideas. Help students develop their ideas before drafting their essays. Have students write down their answer to the question they have chosen—this ultimately will become the thesis of the essay.

1. Ask students to identify passages, questions, and alternative interpretations to address in their essay.
2. Suggest that students work with a partner to review the thesis to address in their essay, asking each other questions such as:
 - ◆ What evidence is needed to support the thesis?
 - ◆ Which passages speak most strongly to the question?
 - ◆ Are there passages or questions that are likely to be seen differently by others?
 - ◆ In what order should the subtopics be addressed?

Drafting and Revising. Allow sufficient time for at least two drafts. Consult the middle and high school writing rubric available at www.greatbooks.org (click on Teacher Resources→Assessment Tools) and explain to students what you will be looking for in their first and second drafts.

After students have completed a first draft suggest revisions to strengthen the structure of the essay and the presentation of ideas. Refer to the writing rubric to help students understand that the revision process produces a steadily improving essay and is a practice of all good writers. After the second draft, look at style, word choice, grammar, spelling, and punctuation.