



The Great Books Foundation

Assessment Tools for Junior Great Books Series 2–6

The Junior Great Books program offers both informal and formal assessment tools and strategies to help you judge how well the activities are working for your class and to evaluate the progress of individual students. The tools and procedures explained below, adapted from the assessment kit of the new Junior Great Books Series 3–5 Leader’s Edition, also allow you and your students to reflect on everyone’s progress using the Shared Inquiry method.

Junior Great Books assessment tools emphasize the three key student learning strands of reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing. You can see a broader view of these objectives in the chart, Great Books Student Learning Objectives: K–12 (page 20).

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Planning for Assessment

Using a variety of assessments will give you the best understanding of your students' progress, and using assessments regularly will allow you and your students to become accustomed to them and proficient at using them. The sample assessment plan below shows how a leader might use the full range of assessment options, alternating options unit by unit to ensure a thorough but manageable assessment schedule.

| | ACTIVITY SCORE | CRITICAL-THINKING RUBRIC | WRITING RUBRIC | PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT |
|-----------------|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| First Semester | Unit 2 | Unit 3 | Unit 4 | |
| | Unit 5 | | | |
| | Unit 8 | Unit 7 | Unit 9 | |
| | Unit 10 or 12 | Unit 10 | | After completing first semester |
| Second Semester | Unit 1 | | Unit 3 | |
| | Unit 5 | Unit 6 | Unit 7 | |
| | Unit 8 | | | |
| | Unit 10 or 12 | Unit 10 | Unit 10 or 11 | After completing second semester |

Of course, your own assessment plan will take into account your Junior Great Books plan and your overall curriculum and calendar. For instance, if you target reading comprehension and critical thinking in your Junior Great Books program, you might not make use of the writing rubric. Whatever your goals, strive for a variety of assessments to gain a full picture of your students' learning and to guide your instruction.



Activity Mini-Rubrics and Activity Score Sheet

Activity mini-rubrics and the activity score sheet (pages 5–6) offer simple and flexible ways to track your students' work in reading comprehension and critical thinking, as well as their class participation. The two mini-rubrics for the sharing questions activity—one for asking questions and one for answering questions—and the mini-rubric for the second reading with directed notes all incorporate written and oral responses, making them logical choices for an activity score. There is also a mini-rubric for all sharing activities, including Shared Inquiry discussion.

The activity score sheet offers another way to track students' participation and progress, not just in the sharing questions and second reading activities, but in all Junior Great Books activities. You can use the marks provided in the activity mini-rubrics or devise your own point system. The activity score is a rough, rule-of-thumb assessment, but as you tally the scores over time they will result in an accurate picture of students' achievement.

For each activity you score, plan to take a few minutes after your Great Books session to mentally review each student's participation and record the scores on the activity score sheet.



Series 2–6 Activity Mini-Rubrics

Mini-Rubrics for Sharing Questions

When they ask questions, look for students to:

| |
|--|
| 0—Comment on the story |
| ✓—Mention puzzling, confusing, or interesting aspects of the story |
| +—Ask questions about the story |
| ++—Explain where questions “came from” when asked |

When they answer questions, look for students to:

| |
|---|
| 0—Offer guesses or far-fetched theories |
| ✓—Suggest literal answers |
| +—Support answers with evidence from the text |
| ++—Recognize when questions are resolved |

Mini-Rubric for Second Reading with Directed Notes

When they share notes or responses, look for students to:

| |
|---|
| 0—Point out passages or state notes and responses |
| ✓—Give simple reasons for notes or responses |
| +—Explain interpretations of passages noted |
| ++—Explain inferences based on specific words and phrases |

Mini-Rubric for All Sharing Activities

When they respond to others’ comments, look for students to:

| |
|--|
| 0—Ignore others’ comments and concentrate on what they have to say |
| ✓—Repeat or copy others’ comments |
| +—Agree or disagree with another’s comments |
| ++—Give reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with another’s comment |



Critical-Thinking Rubric

The critical-thinking rubric (page 8) gives you a detailed view of the critical-thinking skills developed through Shared Inquiry discussion and the Junior Great Books program as a whole. It will alert you to performance levels you can expect to see as your students improve their thinking skills, and it will enable you to assess the skills of individual students.

Your consistent interpretive questioning and follow-up questions are the most important factors in improving your students' critical-thinking skills. After you assess your students' work, reflect on how you might improve your own questioning strategies to give students more opportunities for growth. To help you, a Leader Reflection form is available in the Teacher Resources assessment section on our website at www.greatbooks.org. Look for Reflection and Mentoring Tools for Shared Inquiry Leaders, available in pdf.

The critical-thinking rubric focuses on three areas of critical thinking:

Idea—generating, clarifying, and developing ideas of what the story means

Evidence—supporting and checking these ideas, based on what is in the story

Response—sharing ideas and learning from others by considering alternative ideas and readjusting thinking

As you begin to use the rubric, it is helpful to focus on only one of these objectives. For example, if you focus on evidence, you can listen to see if a student offers evidence only when asked, mentions something from the story to support an idea, or cites and explains how the evidence supports the idea. Use follow-up questions to help students progress from one level to the next.

You can use the critical-thinking rubric to assess students' critical thinking in both discussion and writing. Using these methods together will give you more complete and dependable information.



Series 2–6 Critical-Thinking Rubric

The rubric shows three major critical-thinking areas—idea, evidence, and response—at five performance levels.

| Performance Levels | | Idea: Generating an interpretation | Evidence: Using support from the story | Response: Learning with and from other students |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 5 | Explains answer | Explains how an idea answers the question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates actions and characters to one another • To clarify, spells out assumptions, relates them to the question | Explains how a passage supports an idea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explores meanings and connotations for relevant words, phrases • Sees when evidence works against own idea | Explains and gives reasons for agreement and disagreement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critiques or supports other students' ideas • Asks other students simple questions |
| 4 | Understands issues | Fully understands the interpretive issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infers motives and causes; addresses the question directly • To clarify, tells more about the answer | Understands the need for evidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spontaneously goes back to the story • Focuses on relevant sentences | Understands and roughly summarizes other students' ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be convinced by others • Follows other students' counterarguments |
| 3 | Recognizes alternatives | Asserts a considered answer; is aware of alternative ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May hesitate between answers • To clarify, paraphrases answer | Supports answer against alternative answer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locates relevant major passages • Reads or recounts whole passage | Recognizes alternative answers and agrees or disagrees simply |
| 2 | Offers simple answers | Gives quick, simple answer to the question <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes all-or-nothing, snap judgment • To clarify, repeats answer | Tends not to volunteer support; offers support only when asked <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recalls major story facts • Considers answer self-evident | Reacts briefly or quickly to other students' answers without talking about them |
| 1 | Begins to answer | Talks about the story without addressing the question | Mentions characters and events; may retell the story | Allows others to speak without interrupting |



Assessing Critical Thinking in Written Responses

The Building Your Answer form (page 10) can show you students' thinking about a discussion question in a form that is convenient for you to score.

Each student has the same opportunity to respond to the leader's question in writing, so quiet or shy students can say as much as their more verbal classmates. Also, modifying their answers after discussion encourages students to feel more accountable for learning during discussion. On the other hand, students who struggle with writing, and even more proficient writers, may express their thinking better in discussion.

How to Use the Building Your Answer Form to Assess Students' Written Responses

1. Review with your students relevant levels from the critical-thinking rubric that you will be looking for. Try to recall specific examples in class of critical thinking demonstrating the elements of idea, evidence, or response.
2. Plan to allow enough time in Shared Inquiry discussion for all students to participate fully, including time after the discussion for students to change or add to their answers.
3. Read students' work carefully and assign separate grades for idea, evidence, and response, or grade for just one objective. (Written examples of response will often not appear unless the Building Your Answer prompt calls for it.)
4. Comment briefly on each student's page, in addition to assigning a grade. Often your most effective written response is a follow-up question.



Building Your Answer

Name: _____

Selection: _____

The focus question:

Your answer before the discussion:

Your answer after the discussion (*choose one of the following*):

How did you change or what can you add to your first answer?

What evidence from the story supports your answer?

What idea did you hear in discussion that differed from yours?



Assessing Critical Thinking in Discussion

As you gain experience with Shared Inquiry it will become easier to use the critical-thinking rubric not only to assess students' written responses but also to distinguish the quality of their verbal responses. Discussion responses may display the strengths of students who do not write well, but students' responses will be affected by factors such as time limitations, group size, shyness, and group dynamics. Also, it is unavoidable that your follow-up questions will give different students varying opportunities to develop responses.

Your seating chart will help you recall your students' discussion responses. If you review their Building Your Answer pages, you can further bolster your memory. Better still, record the discussion you wish to assess, either with a video or audio recorder, or have a colleague keep a seating chart for you.

How to Use Your Seating Chart to Grade Students' Discussion Responses

1. Allow enough time in Shared Inquiry discussion for all students to participate fully. This will be easier if you keep the size of the discussion group manageable.
2. Immediately after discussion, review your seating chart and make fuller notes on students' responses.
3. Assess students' contributions, as you recall them, in the areas of idea, evidence, and response. Often, individual responses and even a student's entire contribution to a discussion will pertain only to one area. Consider whether students were offered opportunities to exhibit their skills in all three areas during the discussion.
4. Confer with your students individually while their recollections of the discussion are still fresh. Encourage them to add to and explain their comments. Then, describe the strengths you saw and your suggestions for improvement.



Writing Rubric

The writing rubric (page 13) will help you assess students' expository writing. Because the expository writing assignments focus on the interpretation of stories, the rubric will also reflect students' growth in this area.

This rubric focuses on two traits directly addressed by expository writing assignments in Junior Great Books: content (ideas and evidence) and organization. The writing rubric aligns with most state rubrics and scoring guides for expository writing.

Since Junior Great books strongly emphasizes content and organization, the writing rubric does not include such elements of writing as voice, sentence structure, word choice, and conventions or mechanics. If you wish to assess these elements as well, apply your usual rubric or standards.

Written answers to an interpretive question can also be scored using the critical-thinking rubric (page 8). Use the writing rubric when you are dealing with extended and revised student work. Use the critical-thinking rubric when your primary objective is critical thinking or when you are dealing with shorter work.

Once you have chosen a writing assignment for assessment, review the writing rubric with your students so that they have a clear idea of what to aim for as they draft and revise their work.

How to Use the Writing Rubric to Grade Students' Papers

1. Before you begin grading papers, read through the rubric.
2. Orient yourself by reading quickly through your students' papers and sorting them into three piles: strong, average, and struggling. Compare each pile to the rubric levels before you score the papers individually.
3. Give each paper a score for content and a score for organization, since students might do better with one trait than with the other. If you wish, add the two for a total grade.
4. As you grade, add your own notes to the rubric to reflect students' work.
5. In addition to the grade, give each student's paper two other kinds of comments—positive feedback and gentle suggestions for the next paper. The most effective positive comments are specific responses to students' ideas, such as, "I was really interested in your idea about X," or "Your quotation from page XX seemed very convincing." Such comments encourage students to value and develop their ideas in writing.
6. If possible, hold grading sessions with colleagues: share copies of papers, score them independently, and then meet to compare and discuss your scoring.



Series 2–6 Writing Rubric

The writing rubric focuses on two major elements of writing, content (ideas and evidence) and organization, with five performance levels that are appropriate for students in grades 2–6.

| | Content: Ideas and Evidence | Organization |
|---|--|---|
| 5 | <p>The writing develops and explains ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Several supporting ideas develop and explain the main idea; the reader can explore the idea.• The evidence clearly supports various aspects of the main idea; the reader finds the whole piece convincing. | <p>The writing is well developed and easy to follow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The introduction, body, and conclusion develop the main idea; the reader can see the main idea developing.• The piece clearly explains aspects of the main idea and lays out evidence logically; the reader can follow it readily. |
| 4 | <p>The writing offers interesting, convincing ideas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The main idea is worthwhile; it makes the reader think.• The evidence clearly supports the main idea and there is enough of it; the reader is convinced or at least impressed. | <p>The writing is thorough and easy to follow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The introduction leads directly to the main idea; the reader grasps quickly where the piece is going.• The piece keeps focused on the main idea and lays out evidence logically; the reader sees clearly how all evidence relates to the main idea. |
| 3 | <p>The writing makes a point that is partially developed and supported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The main idea is strong and clear; it interests the reader.• Evidence supports several aspects of the main idea; the reader sees that the idea is logical and probable. | <p>The writing is easy to follow and fairly complete.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an introduction; the reader can connect it with the main idea.• Most of the piece deals with the main idea and evidence for it; the reader can see how parts are connected. |
| 2 | <p>The writing makes a clear point about the topic with some support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The main idea makes sense; the reader can understand it.• Some evidence is given; the reader can see that the main idea fits some of the story facts. | <p>The writing is not always easy to follow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The piece starts out without an introduction; the reader sees what the main idea is.• In places, the writing jumps from one idea or piece of evidence to another; the reader can follow but sometimes gets a little lost. |
| 1 | <p>The writing addresses the topic question or issue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is an answer to the question; the reader can tell what the writer's opinion is.• A few specific parts of the story are referred to; the reader sees that the opinion is based partially on the story. | <p>The writing has a very simple organization or is very short.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The piece stresses one or two important ideas; the reader can see what they are.• The paper is short or breaks off. |



Portfolio Assessment

Junior Great Books is well suited to portfolio assessment, especially if students keep a reader's journal or use Great Books student activity books. This will make it easy for students to review their work over a semester, identify the most significant pieces, and reflect on their growth as writers.

How to Assess Students' Portfolios at the End of Each Semester

1. Explain to students that the purpose of a portfolio is to show the best examples of the many kinds of work they have done and to show how their work improved over time. Share with them the portfolio comment sheet and the portfolio rubric (pages 15–16).
2. Discuss with students aspects of their work they might feel proud of and kinds of assignments they might like to include.
3. Have students review their written work to choose the pieces to submit in their portfolios. They should include notes and drafts with their finished pieces. For each work, have students write and attach a comment sheet.
4. Review your students' portfolios, writing your comments on their comment sheets.
5. Complete a portfolio assessment for each student's portfolio. Arrange individual meetings with students about their portfolios.

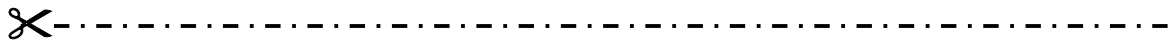


Portfolio Comment Sheet

Choose six pieces of your work that you are especially proud of. Include several different kinds of work. Attach one comment sheet to each, with your comment. After I collect your work, I will write a comment.

Student: I am proud of this piece because

Teacher: This piece shows me that you



Portfolio Comment Sheet

Choose six pieces of your work that you are especially proud of. Include several different kinds of work. Attach one comment sheet to each, with your comment. After I collect your work, I will write a comment.

Student: I am proud of this piece because

Teacher: This piece shows me that you



Portfolio Assessment Rubric

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Date: _____

SCORES

5
SUPERIOR

4
EXCELLENT

3
GOOD

2
SATISFACTORY

1
NEEDS
IMPROVEMENT

| YOUR PORTFOLIO | COMMENTS | SCORE |
|---|----------|-------|
| Shows interesting ideas about the stories you read | | |
| Includes several different kinds of work | | |
| Is done carefully and completely | | |
| Shows that you kept trying and improving | | |



Student Reflection

When students reflect on the process of learning, either individually or as a group, they begin to gain control of the strategies they use and feel responsibility for making the learning activities successful.

Shared Inquiry discussion is a good focus of reflection because it gives students their best opportunity to make use of all the strategies and skills developed in the other activities. Plan to reflect as a group directly after discussion, so students will remember clearly what they did.

For your first reflection sessions, use just one behavior from the My Contribution or Our Collaboration forms (pages 18–19). As students come to understand each behavior, gradually add others, one by one.

Vary your reflection sessions. Use My Contribution and Our Collaboration occasionally. After most discussions, spend a few minutes discussing one critical-thinking trait that you think went especially well or that you tried especially hard to support with your questioning.

Whenever you lead students in reflection, ask follow-up questions about what students find difficult to do or to remember to do, and why. Their comments will give you insights into what you can do to make discussions better.

How to Lead Reflection

1. Before your discussion, choose your target behavior from My Contribution or Our Collaboration, and prepare paper copies or a transparency.
2. Directly after discussion, explain to students that you would like to think about their discussion together, so the class can improve. Give each student a copy of the reflection form or project a transparency.
3. Discuss with the class what the behavior means. At first, suggest examples you observed in discussion; later, ask students to share examples.
4. Ask the students to fill out the forms themselves or to decide on their responses. If you are using Our Collaboration, lead them in sharing their responses. Encourage students to give reasons and examples from the discussion, while you take notes on the board. Remember that students may have different ideas about how the discussion went.
5. Discuss with students ways they and you can improve the next discussion.
6. Before your next discussion, set aside a little time to review the reflection forms from the last discussion, focusing on the ideas for improvement.



My Contribution

Grades 2–6

Name: _____

Story: _____ Date: _____

For each statement, circle the number that describes your work in discussion.

| | Yes | Sometimes | | | No |
|--|------------|------------------|---|---|-----------|
| I read the story twice and thought about it before discussion. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I stayed focused on our leader’s question. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I contributed my own original ideas about the story. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I backed up what I said with evidence from the story. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I listened to others and learned from them. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I asked questions when I was curious or puzzled. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I treated others with consideration. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| I was interested and learned a lot. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

What I did that I’m proud of: _____

What I need to work on: _____



Our Collaboration

Name: _____

Story: _____ Date: _____

For each pair of statements, rate our whole group in Shared Inquiry discussion by circling one of the numbers. A **5** means you agree strongly with the statement to the left of the row of numbers. A **1** means you agree strongly with the statement to the right. We will discuss our responses together so that you can offer examples and suggestions for ways we can all improve.

| | | | | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--|
| Almost all of us contributed. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | A few people did most of the talking. |
| We came up with many different ideas about the story. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | We all tended to say the same thing. |
| We tried to back up our ideas with details from the story. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | We just stated our ideas and don't explain where they came from. |
| We listened to and commented on one another's ideas. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | We didn't pay much attention to what others said. |
| When asked, we tried to explain our ideas and make them clearer to others. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | It was hard for us to say more about our ideas. |
| We were interested and learned a lot. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | We weren't interested and didn't learn much. |

Our goals for next time:



Great Books Student Learning Objectives: K–12

| | READING COMPREHENSION | CRITICAL THINKING |
|------------------------|---|--|
| K–1 Read-Aloud | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about higher-level questions • Recall story details • Sequence story events • Identify favorite parts of the story • Visualize characters and events through drawing and dramatization • Demonstrate greater interest in reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share questions about a story or poem • Understand that some questions have more than one possible answer • Use details from the story to explain or support ideas • Consider other possible ideas about a story • Sustain interest in a story over several sessions |
| Series 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about character motivation • Read passages aloud • Recall and retell details in their own words • Locate relevant passages • Sequence story events • Derive meaning from contextual clues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise questions about stories • Understand the concept of the open-ended question • Offer answers to an interpretive question • Support ideas with evidence from the story • Consider more than one answer to a question |
| Series 3–5 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make inferences and offer ideas about story meaning • Read aloud with increasing fluency and expression • Identify and determine the importance of a concept, theme, or idea in the story • Create mental images about a story to improve and express understanding • Summarize a story or retell significant parts of a story • Connect information from various parts of a story to respond to an interpretive question | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and ask questions about parts of a story they find puzzling or confusing • Understand differences between various types of questions • Generate, clarify, and explore ideas in response to interpretive questions • Support opinions with evidence from a story • Listen and respond to classmates' ideas • Make story-to-story comparisons |
| Middle and High School | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read aloud fluently and expressively • Make interpretive inferences • Offer explanations of character motivation or author purpose • Recall facts, cite details, or refer to specific passages for evidence to support and explain opinions • Recognize tone and point of view • Take notes to recognize patterns or connections, and review places in the text for further reflection, questioning, or evidence to support an answer • Derive word meaning from contextual clues • Reread for patterns, character development, and thematic development • Analyze passages for in-depth interpretation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate interpretive questions • Understand differences between various types of questions • Draw inferences and conclusions • Synthesize and develop ideas • Support ideas with evidence from the text • Consider classmates' opinions • Weigh evidence and revise opinions • Address textual ambiguities and explore problems of meaning • Make connections across selections |



| | WRITING | LISTENING AND SPEAKING |
|--|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record favorite words from a selection Draw pictures to express ideas Dictate and write questions and captions Generate and copy group writing from the board Record information from the story when prompted | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to models of fluent, expressive reading Offer an idea, comment, or opinion Dramatize characters and scenes Explain drawings Retell parts of the story Listen to classmates' ideas and questions |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a question about a story Write a response to a question about a story Respond in writing to questions, giving reasons to support an answer Write about personal experiences that connect to a story Develop creative writing inspired by a story theme or idea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to models of fluent, expressive reading Share ideas about a story Retell a story Agree or respectfully disagree with classmates' ideas Add to classmates' ideas |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write questions based on the story Provide support from the story in written answers to interpretive questions Record evidence from the story to support inferences and ideas Write story summaries Practice and develop prewriting strategies and drafting skills to produce expository, narrative, and descriptive works Use figurative language in writing Use different writing forms, including persuasive essays | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively listen to a story being read aloud Ask interpretive questions Offer ideas in answer to interpretive questions Support an answer with evidence from a story Listen and respond directly to other students Refer to classmates' ideas in discussion |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write interpretive questions about a selection Respond to prereading questions by writing about personal experiences and opinions Take notes while reading, to trace patterns and to support inferences with evidence from the text Write answers to interpretive questions before discussion Revise answers to interpretive questions after discussion based on classmates' responses Synthesize, develop, organize, and defend ideas in postdiscussion essays and story writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to complex texts read aloud with expression Express ideas orally with increasing confidence and sophistication Develop and elaborate on responses to interpretive questions State and explain ideas, inferences, and conclusions Use evidence to persuade others Read aloud with expression and understanding Listen to, respond to, and elaborate on classmates' opinions in a reasoned, respectful way Ask questions about classmates' ideas |