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News from GREAT BOOKS

 The Great Books Foundation
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Reading Proficiency Improves with Junior Great Books®

Model Schools Project Brings Results

In fall 2006, the Great Books Foundation launched the Model Schools Project (MSP), bringing the new Junior Great Books Series 3–5 to a disparate group of schools across the country. The schools represent a broad range of urban, rural, and suburban locales and involve a diverse student population. After one year of program use, project schools report impressive improvements in student performance.*

At four of the MSP schools, more fifth-grade students met or exceeded



Copperfield Elementary School students enjoy a Shared Inquiry discussion.

“I like Junior Great Books because I get to talk about a story instead of just listening to the teacher.”

Third-grade student
Rocklin Elementary School
Rocklin, California

*Standards-based tests were given in 2006 and 2007 in third, fourth, and fifth grades at six schools using Junior Great Books. Statistics regarding percentages of students meeting or exceeding proficiency at each school can be found at www.GreatSchools.net.

proficiency in reading than at other schools in those districts. In addition, five of the MSP schools saw gains in students moving from “not meeting” to “meeting” proficiency in reading from 2006 to 2007.

Writing Skills Also Improve

Student writing samples were collected and scored three times during the Model Schools Project’s first year. In year two of the project, expectations were raised and students were asked to submit a longer writ-

ten piece. Of the fifth graders in the project, 62 percent demonstrated improved writing skills, while half of the fourth graders demonstrated growth. After only a year and a half of using the Junior Great Books program, a significant number of students have doubled their scores in thinking and writing about a text. They have gone from answering a question by merely summarizing parts of the plot to developing meaningful interpretations of stories using evidence from across the

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entire text. Students also improved in their ability to:

- Produce well-organized written responses
- Express and extend ideas
- Provide answers demonstrating strong critical thinking and reading comprehension
- Cite evidence in support of ideas, including quotes, page numbers or examples—a strong indication that students were integrating the habits of mind that Junior Great Books aims to help them develop

All writing samples were scored by a team of high school English teachers. The teachers were surprised to see elementary level students working on the same goals their high school students focus on—interpreting complex texts, formulating arguments, and citing evidence. The

“I have really been surprised with how deep kids can take their interpretations and how well they develop their ideas.”

Michael Stokes, third-grade teacher
Cityview Performing Arts Magnet School
Minneapolis, Minnesota

teachers were impressed that Junior Great Books offers elementary students the opportunity to engage in this sophisticated level of learning so early in their education.



Fifth graders at Gavilan Peak Elementary School discuss a Junior Great Books story.

Focus on Model Schools

Rhineland School District, Rhineland, Wisconsin

According to the tales of pioneer loggers, Wisconsin's north woods is home to the Hodag, a seven-foot monster with pointed horns, sharp tusks, and jagged jaws. The legend of the Hodag lives on and students at three Rhineland elementary schools—Central, Crescent, and Pelican—have embraced Junior Great Books and stories like “The Monster Who Grew Small” with the same spirit of adventure and imagination that inspired the legend.

After using Junior Great Books for one year, more fifth-grade Rhineland students met or exceeded expectations on proficiency tests in both reading and math than in the prior year. In addition, fifth graders at Rhineland model schools experienced greater increases in reading profi-

ciency than did other students in the district.

Improvement in math proficiency demonstrates that improved critical-thinking and comprehension skills positively impact performance across the curriculum. “Students are discovering their own opinions about texts and now know to base them on evidence from within the text. This has carried over to other subjects,” said Amy Guski, third-grade teacher at Crescent Elementary School.

On-site consultation visits from Foundation instructor Fred Hang have been integral to Rhineland's success. By coaching teachers in their classrooms, modeling Shared Inquiry™ discussions, and meeting with teachers one-on-one and in groups, Hang has helped teachers make the best use of Shared Inquiry and Junior Great Books. “I enjoyed

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having Fred consult with us continually throughout the year. Most programs are lacking in this area,” said Rich Fortier, fifth-grade teacher at Central Elementary School.

North Barrington Elementary School, Barrington, Illinois

Despite time challenges in the project’s first year, a greater number of North Barrington fourth- and fifth-grade students met or exceeded proficiency in reading after using Junior Great Books for one year. Principal Deborah Cross has noticed that teachers have become more confident using Shared Inquiry, and teachers report that the method has had an impact across the curriculum.

In addition to valuable on-site consultation visits from Foundation instructor Mike Elsey, North Barrington teachers have benefited from the guidance of Lorraine Plum, a Foundation educational consultant. Plum has not only helped teachers plan how to integrate Junior Great Books into their crowded schedules, she has increased their appreciation of the program’s benefits by helping them see how it complements and strengthens their curriculum. “Teachers no longer view Junior Great Books as an add-on that competes for their time, but rather as an essential component of their reading/language arts program,” said Plum.

Cityview Performing Arts Magnet School, Minneapolis, Minnesota

At Cityview, the Junior Great Books program has not only improved student performance, it has also inspired them as artists. Last spring, third-grade students turned the Haitian folktale “The Banza” (Series 3, Book One) into an opera. Students scripted their own parts, designed and built sets, and rehearsed tirelessly in preparation for a performance attended by peers and parents.

“One of the most exciting parts of Junior Great Books is seeing even the most challenged learners participate and express themselves beautifully.”

Jan Newberry, third-grade teacher
Copperfield Elementary School
Austin, Texas

Cityview fourth-grade students had the lowest scores among district fourth graders on reading pretests and experienced the biggest gains after one year of Junior Great Books. “Junior Great Books has improved student learning in many ways,” said Laura Cavender, Cityview principal. “It improves their comprehension and questioning skills and their ability to support their ideas with the text. It also supports our writing standards because it provides numerous opportunities for written responses, as well as



Cityview Elementary students participate in a Shared Inquiry discussion.

helping them organize their writing.”

Copperfield Elementary School, Austin, Texas

MSP success has continued at Copperfield, as students showed gains in reading and writing on the state TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) test. Copperfield has benefited from the dedicated efforts of project coordinator Nancy Newell, who manages the school’s Junior Great Books schedule. Newell makes sure teachers use the program every other week, giving students broad exposure to a large variety of literature, as well as to the progressive learning benefits built into the Junior Great Books program. Consultation visits from Foundation instructor Bill Siegel have been key to Copperfield’s success. With Newell’s scheduling help, Siegel has visited as many as six classrooms in one day, literally working with teachers from bell to bell.

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Fruitdale Elementary School, Grants Pass, Oregon

Fruitdale principal Peter Maluk has nothing but praise for Junior Great Books. Here is what he had to say after his school had been using the program for one full year:

In this day and age of “high stakes” testing, it is wonderful to have an opportunity to refocus on literature and teaching that encourages our students to think critically and to share in active and relevant learning experiences.

Our teachers have truly supported this program and enjoyed the experience of working with the new edition of Junior Great Books. . . . They have taken the courageous step of setting aside many elements of the traditional reading and language arts to provide time for Junior Great Books on an every-other-week basis. The decision has been rewarded with excited students and teachers, amazing growth in comprehension and analysis, and classroom lessons that are dynamic and provocative. The fact that 100 percent of involved teachers support and remain enthusiastic about JGB is a resounding statement.



An open-air discussion at Gavilan Peak Elementary

Gavilan Peak Elementary School, Anthem, Arizona

At Gavilan Peak, in Anthem, Arizona, the carefully planned Junior Great Books implementation fits well into this thoughtfully designed community. As the population continues to grow, so does the use of Junior Great Books across all grade levels at Gavilan Peak. Last March, the school celebrated Read Across America week with an all-school discussion led by parents and teachers—over one thousand students participated, reading and discussing stories from the new Junior Great Books Series 3–5. This year, the school expanded classroom use of the Junior Great Books program from just third, fourth, and fifth grades to all grades.

“Junior Great Books Shared Inquiry discussions have created so much excitement about reading for every reader at any level of achievement and it has caught on like wildfire.

We wanted to train our students to be evaluative readers and be able to express themselves persuasively. Junior Great Books has taught our students to critically read for personal meaning. . . . The Model Schools Project approach has brought our staff development beyond the dog-and-pony stage to true integration into the instructional habit of teachers,” said Mai-Lon Wong, Gavilan Peak principal.

“Junior Great Books Shared Inquiry discussions have created so much excitement about reading for every reader at any level of achievement and it has caught on like wildfire.”

Mai-Lon Wong, principal
Gavilan Peak Elementary School
Anthem, Arizona

Rocklin Elementary School, Rocklin, California

Principal Jim Trimble makes sure students have a lot to be excited about, both in and out of the classroom. Besides hosting such fun events as a faculty-student exercise dance performance, he’s keen on making sure every student feels challenged in the classroom—not an easy task given the tremendous range of student abilities and talents. That’s why Trimble has found Junior Great Books such a great fit—it serves the various needs of all students while offering an exciting way to read, discuss, and write about great literature. After just a few months of the program—Rocklin is in its first year of the Model Schools Project—students have noticed a difference. As one third-grade student reported, “I like Junior Great Books because I get to talk about a story instead of just listening to the teacher.”

Staples Supports Great Books Readers 2 Leaders

New Service Learning Program Pairs Teens and Younger Students

The Staples Foundation for Learning™ awarded the Great Books Foundation \$10,000 to develop Readers 2 Leaders, a new service learning program that teaches high school students leadership skills, gives them experience teaching, and affords them an opportunity to explore teaching as a possible career. Twenty-two disadvantaged students at Marie Curie Metro High School in Chicago are the first students to participate.

In Readers 2 Leaders, high school students lead after-school Shared Inquiry discussions with elementary and middle school students in their communities. The older students develop leadership skills and serve as positive role models for the younger children. The younger students also receive the benefits of participating in the Junior Great

Books program—reading and discussing outstanding literature.

The Curie students will lead discussions at their neighboring feeder schools, Madero Middle School and Edwards Elementary School. About 150 third- through sixth-grade students will participate.

Before meeting with the younger students, the high school students will develop their own skills in interpretive reading and practice leading discussions with one another. At Curie, their practice sessions are incorporated in their AVID (Advanced Via Individual Determination) and International Baccalaureate CAS (creativity, action, and service) classes. A Readers 2 Leaders handbook will take them step-by-step through the process of

preparing interpretive questions, planning for discussion, and managing a group of students.

Readers 2 Leaders grows out of the Youth Leadership Program (YLP), which was developed and piloted with support from the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, and Chicago Public Schools Office of Education to Careers. Readers 2 Leaders is more affordable than YLP and provides better support for student leaders so the program can be sustained by the high school and elementary/middle school partnership.

The program will be available to high schools and their partner schools this fall. For further information, please contact Margo Criscuola at 800-222-5870, ext. 246.



Great Books Summer Institutes

Shared Inquiry Summer Institute for Middle and High School Teachers

St. John's College, Sante Fe, New Mexico
July 13–16, 2008

Join fellow teachers and Great Books Foundation instructors for a residential three-day workshop in the Shared Inquiry method of learning, on the Sante Fe campus of St. John's College, renowned for its Great Books curriculum. Learn more about this exciting event or register now at www.greatbooks.org/summerinstitutesantafe/.



Junior Great Books Summer Institute 2008

The Great Books Foundation, Chicago, Illinois,
July 21–23, 2008

This exciting three-day summer institute will immerse you in the Shared Inquiry questioning and discussion method using the new Junior Great Books Series 3–5. The event includes a field trip to the Notebaert Nature Museum. Learn more or register now at www.greatbooks.org/summerinstitutechicago/.



Great Books at the Forefront of Curriculum Reform

Minneapolis Pilots Shared Inquiry and Great Books

Twenty diverse Minneapolis middle and high schools have been selected to pilot the use of the Shared Inquiry method and Great Books materials as part of the Minneapolis school district's large curriculum reform and adoption process. The core sequence of Shared Inquiry training, Getting Started (with some adaptations for the pilot), was

held in September 2007, and training instructor Fred Hang has been regularly returning to the schools to model Shared Inquiry discussions and colead with teachers.

Maryland Department of Education Commends Junior Great Books Implementation

The Maryland State Department of Education commended Washington County Public Schools for using

Junior Great Books as part of the reading and language arts curriculum in the department's approval of the district's curriculum reform plan. Thirty-nine Washington County schools have implemented Junior Great Books programs.