



Great Books Programs and the Texas Educational Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading

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 develop the student competencies in the Texas Educational Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English Language Arts and Reading.

Both Great Books programs and TEKS share the goal of helping students acquire the habits and strategies of self-directed critical thinkers, readers, writers, and learners. The chart below compares key TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading with the characteristics of Great Books programs.

Writing

TEKS

- A. Compose a variety of texts that demonstrate clear focus, the logical development of ideas in well-organized paragraphs, and the use of appropriate language that advances the author's purpose.
1. Determine effective approaches, forms, and rhetorical techniques that demonstrate understanding of the writer's purpose and audience.
 2. Generate ideas and gather information relevant to the topic and purpose, keeping careful records of outside sources.
 3. Evaluate relevance, quality, sufficiency, and depth of preliminary ideas and information, organize material generated, and formulate a thesis.
 4. Recognize the importance of revision as the key to effective writing. Each draft should refine ideas and organize them more logically and fluidly, use language more precisely and effectively, and draw the reader to the author's purpose.
 5. Edit writing for proper voice, tense, and syntax, assuring that it conforms to standard English.

Great Books Programs

Written and creative responses flow naturally from Shared Inquiry discussion, where students extend and elaborate on their ideas about a story.

Instructors choose from among suggested activities to help students deepen their understanding of the story while honing other language arts skills and concepts, including:

- Essay practice
- Creative writing
- Persuasive writing
- Writing instructions
- Making inferences
- Letter writing

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TEKS

- A. Locate explicit textual information, draw complex inferences, and analyze and evaluate the information within and across texts of varying lengths.
1. Use effective reading strategies to determine a written work's purpose and intended audience.
 2. Use text features and graphics to form an overview of informational texts and to determine where to locate information.
 3. Identify explicit and implicit textual information including main ideas and author's purpose.
 4. Draw and support complex inferences from text to summarize, draw conclusions, and distinguish facts from simple assertions and opinions.
 5. Analyze the presentation of information and the strength and quality of evidence used by the author, and judge the coherence and logic of the presentation and the credibility of an argument.
 6. Analyze imagery in literary texts.
 7. Evaluate the use of both literal and figurative language to inform and shape the perceptions of readers.
 8. Compare and analyze how generic features are used across texts.
 9. Identify and analyze the audience, purpose, and message of an informational or persuasive text.
 10. Identify and analyze how an author's use of language appeals to the senses, creates imagery, and suggests mood.
 11. Identify, analyze, and evaluate similarities and differences in how multiple texts present information, argue a position, or relate a theme.
- B. Understand new vocabulary and concepts and use them accurately in reading, speaking, and writing.
1. Identify new words and concepts acquired through study of their relationships to other words and concepts.
 2. Apply knowledge of roots and affixes to infer the meanings of new words.
 3. Use reference guides to confirm the meanings of new words or concepts.

Great Books Programs

Great Books programs are unparalleled in developing students' critical thinking skills. Students read challenging selections and then participate in inquiry-based discussion. The teacher only asks questions, and students respond to those questions by expressing their own ideas and supporting those ideas with evidence from the text. Because discussion is based on the text at hand, students learn to evaluate information carefully. By hearing others' interpretations, students learn to look at complex ideas in more than one way

Students learn to:

- Evaluate and revise ideas
- Question and test arguments, while weighing evidence
- Draw conclusions
- Support an argument with reasoning and evidence from the text
- Revise and improve arguments
- Recognize extensions and applications of conclusions

Through the Shared Inquiry method, students are given many opportunities to clarify their understanding of the text. Students' thorough engagement with the text enables them to closely examine how language is used. Great Books programs invite students to explore the text through two readings, a Shared Inquiry discussion, and interpretive activities that include note taking, vocabulary development, and postdiscussion writing. Vocabulary activities help students examine the meaning of a word in different contexts and how the meaning of an individual word contributes to the overall meaning of a story.

Reading, continued

TEKS

C. Describe, analyze, and evaluate information within and across literary and other texts from a variety of cultures and historical periods.

1. Read a wide variety of texts from American, European, and world literatures.
2. Analyze themes, structures, and elements of myths, traditional narratives, and classical and contemporary literature.
3. Analyze works of literature for what they suggest about the historical period and cultural contexts in which they were written.
4. Analyze and compare the use of language in literary works from a variety of world cultures.

D. Explain how literary and other texts evoke personal experience and reveal character in particular historical circumstances.

1. Describe insights gained about oneself, others, or the world from reading specific texts.
2. Analyze the influence of myths, folktales, fables, and classical literature from a variety of world cultures on later literature and film.

Great Books Programs

The Great Books Foundation publishes the finest children's literature from around the world. Students read classic and modern texts from Africa, Asia, Canada, Europe, India, Latin America, the Middle East, and many different regions of the United States. Students encounter the voices of such diverse and renowned authors as Isaac Bashevis Singer, Alma Flor Ada, Langston Hughes, Lois Lowry, Joseph Bruchac, Emily Dickinson, Anton Chekhov, Tove Jansson, and Ray Bradbury.

Speaking

A. Understand the elements of communication both in informal group discussions and formal presentations (e.g., accuracy, relevance, rhetorical features, organization of information).

1. Understand how style and content of spoken language varies in different contexts and influences the listener's understanding.
2. Adjust presentation (delivery, vocabulary, length) to particular audiences and purposes.

B. Develop effective speaking styles for both group and one-on-one situations.

1. Participate actively and effectively in one-on-one oral communication situations.
2. Participate actively and effectively in group discussions.
3. Plan and deliver focused and coherent presentations that convey clear and distinct perspectives and demonstrate solid reasoning.

The Great Books Foundation's Shared Inquiry method of learning helps students learn to listen carefully and to communicate complex ideas in small and large discussion groups. The literature included in Great Books K–12 materials is chosen based on its ability to help students develop an understanding of and appreciation for the diversity of ideas that emerge in active and respectful classroom discussions.

Listening

TEKS

A. Apply listening skills as an individual and as a member of a group in a variety of settings (e.g., lectures, discussions, conversations, team projects, presentations, interviews).

1. Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of a public presentation.
2. Interpret a speaker's message; identify the position taken and the evidence in support of that position.
3. Use a variety of strategies to enhance listening comprehension (e.g., focus attention on message, monitor message for clarity and understanding, provide verbal and nonverbal feedback, note cues such as change of pace or particular words that indicate a new point is about to be made, select and organize key information).

B. Listen effectively in informal and formal situations.

1. Listen critically and respond appropriately to presentations.
2. Listen actively and effectively in one-on-one communication situations.
3. Listen actively and effectively in group discussions.

Great Books Programs

Students explore the story's meaning by discussing an interpretive question. Students engage in discussion by sharing ideas about a story, supporting those ideas with evidence, and listening and responding to other students' ideas.

Discussing a story helps students form their own ideas about its meaning while thoughtfully considering the ideas of others through active and purposeful listening.

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 also learn to:

- Implement the Shared Inquiry method to improve reading comprehension, critical thinking, and writing skills
- Practice the facilitative role 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

Great Books also offers a variety of customized courses and consultation services. For more information, contact us at **800.222.5870** or visit **greatbooks.org**.



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