

Great Books Programs and the Pennsylvania Core Standards for English Language Arts

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 Pennsylvania Core Standards for English Language Arts.

These core academic standards grew out of an extended effort by the state to develop standards that would ensure

that all students are “college and career ready” in literacy when they complete high school. The Great Books programs and the Pennsylvania Core Standards share the goal of helping students master the skills and capacities of the literate individual.

The following chart compares the Pennsylvania Core Standards for English Language Arts with the characteristics of Great Books programs. For the complete list of grade specific Pennsylvania Core Standards for English Language Arts, visit pdesas.org/Standard/PACore.

Reading Literature and Informational Text

Students read and respond to works of literature and informational texts—with an emphasis on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and making connections among ideas and between texts with a focus on textual evidence.

Pennsylvania Core Standards

Great Books Programs

Key Ideas and Details

Students should be able to:

- Summarize the text
- Determine theme and central idea using text details
- Cite, explain, infer, and draw conclusions from text evidence
- Analyze development of characters, events, and ideas throughout the text

Great Books programs use thematically rich, diverse literature and informational texts from renowned authors. The Shared Inquiry methodology develops the high level of critical thinking required to comprehend both types of text. Interpretive activities accompany each reading selection to build strong reading and analytic skills that extend across all disciplines. Students learn to:

- Strategically read and annotate text
- Generate questions and ideas about the meaning of a text
- Infer, analyze, evaluate, and revise ideas
- Analyze how and why characters, events, and ideas develop across the text
- Draw conclusions about the central ideas and themes of a text based on text evidence
- Support and summarize arguments with reasoning and evidence

For more information about Great Books programs, contact us at 800.222.5870 or visit greatbooks.org.

Pennsylvania Core Standards

Great Books Programs

Craft and Structure

Students should be able to:

- Determine purpose and analyze points of view within the text
- Analyze how the structure of the text contributes to its meaning
- Determine the meaning of words and phrases in context, including interpretation of figurative language

The combination of high-quality literature, Shared Inquiry discussion, and interpretive activities helps students develop a deeper understanding of the text. Students:

- Determine purpose and theme
- Examine multiple points of view and perspectives
- Discover how parts of a text relate to the whole
- Examine how choice of language—words, phrases, and passages—affects meaning and style

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Students should be able to:

- Determine and evaluate the argument and claims in a text, as well as the relevancy and sufficiency of evidence
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes, topics, information, events, and characters to build knowledge
- Analyze how visual and multimedia elements and formats contribute to the meaning, tone, or beauty of a text

The Shared Inquiry method teaches students to:

- Interpret the meaning of a text using sufficient text evidence to support claims
- Consider the ideas of others to gain deeper insight
- Develop, articulate, and support their own ideas, stating them clearly and fully
- Explain and defend concepts
- Agree and disagree constructively

Cross-text activities provide students with opportunities to compare and contrast themes, information, and styles in multiple texts.

Activities engage students with text using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities to deepen understanding and appreciation of the text.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use

Students should be able to determine the meaning of words and phrases and interpret figurative language as used in context by choosing flexibly from a range of strategies and tools.

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

Range of Reading

Students should be able to read and comprehend complex literary fiction and informational texts on grade level, reading 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 progress in reading level, conceptual complexity, and length throughout the programs.

Writing

Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

Pennsylvania Core Standards

Types of Writing

Students should be able to draw evidence from literary and informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Students should be able to write:

- Informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information clearly
- Opinion/argumentative texts to support claims
- Narrative texts to develop real or imagined experiences or events

Great Books Programs

Great Books programs integrate writing with reading and discussion activities that solve central problems of meaning in a text. Students engage in all types of writing with an emphasis on opinion/argumentative and narrative writing.

Carefully constructed interpretive questions, activities, and materials require the use of textual evidence to support, revise, and deepen understanding of the text.

The Shared Inquiry method provides a powerful model for thinking that enriches and informs student writing. Students learn to write clear, well-organized, and developed texts through:

- Interpretive writing activities—provide a structure for engaged reading and for testing ideas for clarity, coherence, and text support
- Discussion—creates a sense of audience and perspective
- Postdiscussion writing—helps organize knowledge and support arguments with reasoning and evidence

Elements of Writing

Students should be able to produce clear and coherent writing with organization and style appropriate to purpose and audience. Elements of writing include:

- Focus
- Content
- Organization
- Style
- Conventions of language

Great Books programs use writing activities and materials that foster development, organization, and clear articulation of ideas consistent with purpose and audience. Complex, authentic reading selections provide models for writing in a variety of genres.

Students learn to use all the elements of writing as they analyze, discuss, and write about these complex texts. The programs provide high-level interpretive questions and prompts, student-generated questions, planning organizers, guided notes, interpretive writing activities, and research projects.

Production and Distribution of Writing

Students should be able to develop and strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach with guidance and support of peers and adults.

Students engage in all aspects of the writing process from planning to publishing. Writing activities include modeling, guided practice, and use of templates to organize thinking. Students edit and revise writing using peer review and rubrics.

Writing, continued

Pennsylvania Core Standards

Great Books Programs

Research and Sources

Students should be able to:

- Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources to build knowledge
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information into writing

Suggestions are provided for research topics and themes related to reading selections. Students are encouraged to use a range of print and digital sources.

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 activities are woven throughout each unit, providing students ample opportunities to write for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Time frames and length of writing vary from short to extended—questions, notes, responses about text-related interpretive issues, written responses before and after Shared Inquiry discussion, and longer, more developed essays and narratives.

Speaking and Listening

Students present appropriately in formal speaking situations, listen critically, and respond intelligently as individuals or in group discussions.

Comprehension and Collaboration

Students should be able to:

- Engage effectively in collaborative discussions on topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- Critically listen, paraphrase, summarize, and evaluate a speaker's argument, reasoning, and use of evidence
- Analyze and interpret information presented in diverse media and formats, including visual, quantitative, and oral

Conversation and collaboration is integral to all interpretive activities in Great Books programs. In Shared Inquiry discussion, students 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; synthesize and build on others' ideas
- Agree and disagree with others constructively

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Students should be able to include multimedia and visual displays in presentations to enhance and clarify information.

Curriculum connections and project ideas provide students with opportunities and suggestions to use oral, visual, and diverse media for research and presentations.

Conventions of Standard English

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

Students develop conventions of standard English by engaging in Shared Inquiry discussion, reading, and analysis of challenging texts.