

Great Books Programs and Social and Emotional Learning Standards

Introduction

The Great Books Foundation publishes effective, inquiry-based language arts programs for grades K–12 that improve students’ achievement in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking and listening. The Great Books programs combine classroom materials and the Shared Inquiry™ method of learning to develop social and emotional competencies and skills needed for success in school and life.

There is a national movement to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) into the education process. Illinois is the first state to adopt comprehensive K–12 SEL standards that address the following competencies identified by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning:

- Self-awareness and self-management
- Social-awareness and relationships
- Responsible decision-making

Great Books programs and SEL share the goal of helping students develop the skills needed to think critically, appreciate diverse perspectives, communicate, solve problems, and collaborate with others through responsible, respectful civil discourse.

The chart below compares SEL standards and skills with characteristics of Great Books programs. For more information about SEL, visit the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning at www.casel.org, and the Illinois State Board of Education at www.isbe.net.

Self-Awareness and Self-Management

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

Identify and manage one’s own emotions and behaviors

Students learn to:

- Label emotions accurately and understand how they are linked to behavior and situations
- Analyze how thoughts and emotions affect decisions and behavior
- Control impulsive behavior
- Express emotion in a socially acceptable manner
- Persevere in overcoming obstacles

Great Books Programs

Great Books programs provide students with opportunities to develop insight into their own emotions and behaviors through exposure to and analysis of high-quality literature featuring complex characters who face challenges and conflicts. Students develop perseverance by using a variety of strategies to comprehend and uncover meanings within a complex text, including multiple readings, questioning, discussion, note-taking, and writing responses with multiple drafts.

Through Shared Inquiry discussions and interpretive reading and writing activities, students analyze and evaluate how a variety of factors, including thoughts, feelings, values, and personal qualities, contribute to characters’ successes or failures. Students develop skills to manage their emotions, control impulsive behavior, and respectfully express ideas by adhering to Shared Inquiry discussion guidelines.

Shared Inquiry™ is a trademark of the Great Books Foundation.

Self-Awareness and Self-Management, continued

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

Great Books Programs

Recognize personal qualities and effectively use external supports

Students learn to:

- Recognize personal skills and interests
- Analyze how personal qualities influence choices and outcomes
- Set priorities to build on strengths and identify areas of improvement
- Use school and community supports to achieve success

Through structured activities and Shared Inquiry discussion, students explore a text both individually and together, with opportunities to connect their interpretations of a text to their own choices and values. Students learn to:

- Identify attributes, emotions, and behaviors that influence characters' choices and outcomes and analyze characters' struggles and triumphs
- Ask and answer questions to deepen understanding, listen attentively, and respond positively
- Receive support through constructive feedback from teacher and peer-review processes

Monitor one's own progress toward achieving personal and academic goals

Students learn to:

- Accurately assess their strengths, values, and interests
- Set goals and create a plan for classroom behaviors and academic success
- Use criteria to monitor progress on short-term goals
- Analyze why they achieved or did not achieve a goal
- Use strategies to overcome obstacles to achieving goals

Great Books programs provide a variety of reflection and assessment activities and tools, including rubrics with criteria to help students personally assess areas of strength and set goals for improvement in reading, writing, thinking, and discussion. Students also evaluate their critical thinking and personal conduct during Shared Inquiry discussions and set goals for improvement.

Social Awareness and Relationships

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

Great Books Programs

Recognize and respect the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others

Students learn to:

- Recognize that others may experience things differently and have their own feelings and perspectives
- Listen and use conversation to show understanding of feelings, opinions, and perspectives of others
- Analyze how their behavior may affect others

The cornerstone of all Great Books programs is Shared Inquiry discussion, in which students discuss interpretive questions and consider multiple plausible answers to uncover meaning in a text. Through questioning and response to students' ideas, teachers model behaviors that encourage recognition of others' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. In Shared Inquiry discussion, students:

- Explore character traits and motivation in an effort to understand characters' perspectives and actions
- Collaborate to solve problems of meaning
- Develop an appreciation of different interpretations and perspectives
- Learn to agree and disagree respectfully, modifying interpretations to reflect insights gained from others

Interpretive, evaluative, and speculative writing prompts help students develop understanding and perspective about characters' decisions, motives, and actions.

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

Great Books Programs

Recognize and respect individual and group similarities and differences

Students learn to:

- Identify differences and contributions of various social and cultural groups
- Explain how social and cultural differences increase vulnerability to bullying; identify ways to address it
- Analyze the origins and negative effects of stereotyping and prejudice
- Work effectively with and show respect for individuals from different social and cultural groups

Great Books literature represents a variety of cultures and social groups, exposing students to the uniqueness of particular cultures. Readings and interpretive activities explore universal themes and questions common to the human condition, including personal identity and relationships.

The literature is multilayered thematically to show the complexity of themes, such as: courage, honesty, self-respect, belonging, cultural differences, stereotyping, and prejudice. Shared Inquiry discussion and interpretive activities help students understand how groups positively and negatively affect individuals while deepening their understanding and appreciation of personal, social, and cultural differences.

Use communication and social skills to interact effectively with others

Students learn to:

- Establish positive relationships with others
- Work effectively and collaboratively in groups
- Request help and provide support to others

Conversation and collaboration are integral to Shared Inquiry discussion and interpretive activities in Great Books programs. Students experience the power of language to communicate complex ideas, working together to solve problems of meaning as they:

- Develop, articulate, and support ideas
- Listen attentively; agree and disagree constructively
- Consider and respond to others' ideas
- Reflect on ways to improve participation and collaboration

Teachers model and encourage collaborative attitudes and behavior strategies to monitor and encourage student participation and respectful interactions.

Cooperate and communicate respectfully and constructively to resolve conflicts with others

Students learn to:

- Identify causes and consequences of conflicts
- Use constructive approaches to resolve problems and conflicts
- Use strategies to resist peer pressure
- Develop negotiating skills

Students identify the causes and consequences of conflicts in Great Books reading selections through collaborative analysis and evaluation of the stories, themes, and characters. Students discuss and write about possible ways to resolve these conflicts, and learn ways to constructively handle their own challenges and conflicts. Teacher questioning helps students uncover different interpretations and perspectives, find agreement or disagreement, and encourage consideration and valuing of others' ideas.

Responsible Decision-Making

Social and Emotional Learning Skills

Great Books Programs

Consider ethical, societal, and safety factors and consequences in making decisions

Students learn to:

- Respect the rights of self and others
- Base decisions on honesty, respect, fairness, and compassion for others
- Take personal responsibility for making ethical decisions
- Learn ways social norms affect decision-making and behavior

Great Books programs feature literature with characters who experience inner conflict as they make decisions about their actions. Through reading, writing, and Shared Inquiry discussion, students analyze and evaluate characters' actions and motives. Students examine how characters resolve their moral and ethical quandaries and the impact of group behavior and norms on those decisions. They gain insight into the types of decisions that lead to positive and negative outcomes.

Students engage in a variety of theme-based activities to deepen their personal understanding of how themes connect to the story, world, and themselves. Activities include self-reflection, role-playing, games, projects, cross-text analysis, and written response.

Use decision-making skills to deal responsibly with academic and social situations

Students learn to:

- Make positive choices when interacting with others
- Use decision-making skills in a range of social and academic situations
- Make decisions and solve problems using effective methods by defining the problem, gathering information, generating alternative solutions, anticipating consequences, and evaluating and learning from their decisions and actions

Great Books programs provide a systematic approach to help students solve problems of meaning within a text. Students learn to identify problems, to generate and express ideas, to support ideas with evidence, and to listen and respond to the ideas of others. Through this process students learn a consistent and organized approach to critical thinking that can be applied to their academic work and their lives in general.

Theme-based activities provide students with opportunities to deepen and apply their understanding of universal themes, reflecting on and informing the decisions they make in their own lives.

Use decision-making skills to deal responsibly with academic and social situations

Students learn to:

- Evaluate their participation and how to positively contribute to others
- Work cooperatively with others to complete projects

Through Great Books activities, students learn to recognize and respect the views and feelings of others, appreciating that each person has a role in contributing to the conversation.

Students learn to follow the guidelines of Shared Inquiry discussion and assess their critical thinking and personal conduct according to established criteria for cooperating in groups.