

# Great Books Programs and Your Gifted Students

## Proficiency Is Not Enough

Gifted students need and deserve challenging curricula. If they don't get it, they often disengage from school, with tragic results. Studies show that 18 to 25 percent of gifted students drop out of school.<sup>1</sup> The lower the social and economic status of the gifted student, the more likely the student is to drop out.<sup>2</sup>

Gifted students are bright, but they are still children. They will not teach themselves; they need educators' expert help as much as any other student.

There *is* something you can do to help your gifted students. Research shows that intervention for gifted students truly works, whether it takes the form of pullout programs, cluster grouping, enriched curricula, gifted classrooms, or acceleration.<sup>3</sup> All these practices increase gifted students' test scores, and, more importantly, help gifted students stay engaged and on track for success in school and in life.

## How Great Books Programs Can Help

Great Books programs—which combine challenging, complex literature with inquiry-based reading, writing, and discussion activities—will complement most gifted education approaches and can be flexibly implemented in almost any classroom setting:

- **As a pullout program:** Have your gifted students meet once or twice a week (in or out of class) to read Great Books selections and share their ideas about them during Shared Inquiry™ discussions.
- **As independent or cluster-group work:** Assign writing activities, creative response activities, Reader's Journal prompts, or other extension activities to gifted groups or individuals working at a classroom center during a language arts or reading block.
- **As a supplemental program for the whole class:** Depending on your available time and your students' needs, implement all or some of the Great Books sequence of inquiry-based activities while taking advantage of the differentiation suggestions for struggling, on-level, and gifted students.
- **As the core literature/language arts program for gifted classrooms:** Take advantage of the full range of Great Books activities and suggested cross-curricular projects and readings to encourage transference of the Shared Inquiry method across your language arts curriculum and beyond. Great Books programs are designed to help students meet the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts in the areas of reading comprehension, critical thinking, writing, and listening and speaking.

## How Great Books Programs Meet Gifted Criteria

Desired Program Elements for Gifted Language Arts Curricula	Great Books Programs
Feature literature that pushes the reader to think about, analyze, and develop ideas by both answering and posing questions. <sup>4</sup>	Feature multicultural literature selected for its high literary quality and ability to support rigorous inquiry. Students are challenged by both the content and the extended interaction with the text during reading, discussion, and writing activities.
Include texts with an extensive range of vocabulary that students can examine in context. <sup>5</sup>	Offer authentic literature using a wide range of vocabulary, accompanied by activities to help students determine meaning from context.
Emphasize process skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. <sup>6</sup>	Develop critical thinking strategies such as asking questions, generating and revising ideas, supporting ideas with relevant evidence, responding to the ideas of others, weighing different arguments, and presenting ideas clearly and persuasively.
Offer inquiry-based curricular components in which meaning is central and multiple answers are typical. <sup>7</sup>	Utilize the Shared Inquiry™ reading and discussion method, in which students formulate their own interpretations of a text’s meaning, use the text to support their answers, and listen and respond to the ideas of their peers.

### Great Books and Gifted Teachers: Fostering Teaching Excellence

In the groundbreaking report on gifted children’s educational needs, *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America’s Brightest Students* (2004), teachers are recognized as “critical in the life of every gifted child.”<sup>8</sup> Great Books programs support teachers of gifted students with renowned professional development in which participants learn to activate students’ curiosity and critical thinking abilities, develop higher-level questioning skills, and lead Shared Inquiry discussions. Learning Forward and the National Education Association have both recognized the Great Books professional development program as one that increases student achievement in elementary, middle, and high school grades.

**For more information about Great Books programs and gifted students, contact your Great Books consultant at 800-222-5870 or visit [greatbooks.org](http://greatbooks.org).**

## Notes

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2. Renzulli, J. S. & Park, S. (2002). Giftedness and high school dropouts: Personal, family, and school-related factors. Storrs, CT: The University of Connecticut, The National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. <http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/nrcgt/renzpark.html>.
3. Reis, S. M. (2010). Is there still a need for gifted education? An examination of current research. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 20(4), 308–317.
4. Schnur, R. & Marmor, S. G. (2008). Reading, writing, and raising the bar: Exploring gifts and talents in literacy. In L. V. Shavinina (ed.), *International Handbook on Giftedness* (713–725). New York: Springer.
5. Reis, S. M., et al. (2004). Reading instruction for talented readers: Case studies documenting few opportunities for continuous progress. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 48(4), 315–338.
6. VanTassel-Baska, J. & Brown, E. F. (2007). Toward best practice: An analysis of the efficacy of curriculum models in gifted education. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 51(4), 342–358.
7. Robinson, A., Shore, B. M. & Enersen, D. L. (2007). *Best practices in gifted education*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
8. Colangelo, N., Assouline, S. & Gross, M. (2004). *A nation deceived: How schools hold back America's brightest students* (Vol. 1). [http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation\\_deceived/](http://www.accelerationinstitute.org/nation_deceived/).