Junior Great Books
Sample Lesson Plans

Grades 2–5

Great Books Foundation

Inspiring ideas, dialogue, and lives
Juan had been a thief for many years. Because he did his stealing by night, his skin had become pale and sickly. Because he spent his time either hiding or sneaking about, his body had become shriveled and bent. And because he had neither friend nor relative to make him smile, his face was always twisted into an angry frown.

One night, drawn by a light shining through the trees, Juan came upon a hut. He crept up to the door and through a crack saw an old woman sitting at a plain wooden table.
What was that shining in her hand? Juan wondered. He could not believe his eyes: it was a gold coin. Then he heard the woman say to herself, “I must be the richest person in the world.”

Juan decided instantly that all the woman’s gold must be his. He thought that the easiest thing to do was to watch until the woman left. Juan hid in the bushes and huddled under his poncho, waiting for the right moment to enter the hut.

Juan was half asleep when he heard knocking at the door and the sound of insistent voices. A few minutes later, he saw the woman, wrapped in a black cloak, leave the hut with two men at her side.

Here’s my chance! Juan thought. And, forcing open a window, he climbed into the empty hut.
He looked about eagerly for the gold. He looked under the bed. It wasn’t there. He looked in the cupboard. It wasn’t there, either. Where could it be? Close to despair, Juan tore away some beams supporting the thatch roof.

Finally, he gave up. There was simply no gold in the hut.

All I can do, he thought, is find the old woman and make her tell me where she’s hidden it.

So he set out along the path that she and her two companions had taken.

It was daylight by the time Juan reached the river. The countryside had been deserted, but here, along the riverbank, were two huts. Nearby, a man and his son were hard at work, hoeing potatoes.
It had been a long, long time since Juan had spoken to another human being. Yet his desire to find the woman was so strong that he went up to the farmers and asked, in a hoarse, raspy voice, “Have you seen a short, gray-haired woman, wearing a black cloak?”

“Oh, you must be looking for Doña Josefa,” the young boy said. “Yes, we’ve seen her. We went to fetch her this morning, because my grandfather had another attack of—”

“Where is she now?” Juan broke in.

“She is long gone,” said the father with a smile. “Some people from across the river came looking for her, because someone in their family is sick.”

“How can I get across the river?” Juan asked anxiously.

“Only by boat,” the boy answered. “We’ll row you across later, if you’d like.” Then turning back to his work, he added, “But first we must finish digging up the potatoes.”
The thief muttered, “Thanks.” But he quickly grew impatient. He grabbed a hoe and began to help the pair of farmers. The sooner we finish, the sooner we’ll get across the river, he thought. And the sooner I’ll get to my gold!

It was dusk when they finally laid down their hoes. The soil had been turned, and the wicker baskets were brimming with potatoes.

“Now can you row me across?” Juan asked the father anxiously.

“Certainly,” the man said. “But let’s eat supper first.”

Juan had forgotten the taste of a home-cooked meal and the pleasure that comes from sharing it with others. As he sopped up the last of the stew with a chunk of dark bread, memories of other meals came back to him from far away and long ago.
By the light of the moon, father and son guided their boat across the river.

“What a wonderful healer Doña Josefa is!” the boy told Juan. “All she had to do to make Abuelo better was give him a cup of her special tea.”

“Yes, and not only that,” his father added, “she brought him a gold coin.”

Juan was stunned. It was one thing for Doña Josefa to go around helping people, but how could she go around handing out gold coins—his gold coins?

When the threesome finally reached the other side of the river, they saw a young man sitting outside his hut.

“This fellow is looking for Doña Josefa,” the father said, pointing to Juan.

“Oh, she left some time ago,” the young man said.

“Where to?” Juan asked tensely.

“Over to the other side of the mountain,” the young man replied, pointing to the vague outline of mountains in the night sky.

“How did she get there?” Juan asked, trying to hide his impatience.
“By horse,” the young man answered. “They came on horseback to get her because someone had broken his leg.”

“Well, then I need a horse, too,” Juan said urgently.

“Tomorrow,” the young man replied softly. “Perhaps I can take you tomorrow, maybe the next day. First I must finish harvesting the corn.”

So Juan spent the next day in the fields, bathed in sweat from sunup to sundown.

Yet each ear of corn that he picked seemed to bring him closer to his treasure. And later that evening, when he helped the young man husk several ears so they could boil them for supper, the yellow kernels glittered like gold coins.

While they were eating, Juan thought about Doña Josefa. Why, he wondered, would someone who said she was the world’s richest woman spend her time taking care of every sick person for miles around?
The following day, the two set off at dawn. Juan could not recall when he last had noticed the beauty of the sunrise. He felt strangely moved by the sight of the mountains, barely lit by the faint rays of the morning sun.

As they neared the foothills, the young man said, “I’m not surprised you’re looking for Doña Josefa. The whole countryside needs her. I went for her because my wife had been running a high fever. In no time at all, Doña Josefa had her on the road to recovery. And what’s more, my friend, she brought her a gold coin!”

Juan groaned inwardly. To think that someone could hand out gold so freely! What a strange woman Doña Josefa is, Juan thought. Not only is she willing to help one person after another, but she doesn’t mind traveling all over the countryside to do it!
“Well, my friend,” said the young man finally, “this is where I must leave you. But you don’t have far to walk. See that house over there? It belongs to the man who broke his leg.”

The young man stretched out his hand to say goodbye. Juan stared at it for a moment. It had been a long, long time since the thief had shaken hands with anyone. Slowly, he pulled out a hand from under his poncho. When his companion grasped it firmly in his own, Juan felt suddenly warmed, as if by the rays of the sun.

But after he thanked the young man, Juan ran down the road. He was still eager to catch up with Doña Josefa. When he reached the house, a woman and a child were stepping down from a wagon.
“Have you seen Doña Josefa?” Juan asked.
“We’ve just taken her to Don Teodosio’s,” the woman said. “His wife is sick, you know—”
“How do I get there?” Juan broke in. “I’ve got to see her.”
“It’s too far to walk,” the woman said amiably. “If you’d like, I’ll take you there tomorrow. But first I must gather my squash and beans.”
So Juan spent yet another long day in the fields. Working beneath the summer sun, Juan noticed that his skin had begun to tan. And although he had to stoop down to pick the squash, he found that he could now stretch his body. His back had begun to straighten, too.
Later, when the little girl took him by the hand to show him a family of rabbits burrowed under a fallen tree, Juan’s face broke into a smile. It had been a long, long time since Juan had smiled.
Yet his thoughts kept coming back to the gold.

The following day, the wagon carrying Juan and the woman lumbered along a road lined with coffee fields.

The woman said, “I don’t know what we would have done without Doña Josefa. I sent my daughter to our neighbor’s house, who then brought Doña Josefa on horseback. She set my husband’s leg and then showed me how to brew a special tea to lessen the pain.”

Getting no reply, she went on. “And, as if that weren’t enough, she brought him a gold coin. Can you imagine such a thing?”

Juan could only sigh. No doubt about it, he thought, Doña Josefa is someone special. But Juan didn’t know whether to be happy that Doña Josefa had so much gold she could freely hand it out, or angry for her having already given so much of it away.
When they finally reached Don Teodosio’s house, Doña Josefa was already gone. But here, too, there was work that needed to be done. . . .

Juan stayed to help with the coffee harvest. As he picked the red berries, he gazed up from time to time at the trees that grew, row upon row, along the hillsides. What a calm, peaceful place this is! he thought.

The next morning, Juan was up at daybreak. Bathed in the soft dawn light, the mountains seemed to smile at him. When Don Teodosio offered him a lift on horseback, Juan found it difficult to have to say goodbye.

“What a good woman Doña Josefa is!” Don Teodosio said, as they rode down the hill toward the sugar cane fields. “The minute she heard about my wife being sick, she came with her special herbs. And as if that weren’t enough, she brought my wife a gold coin!”
In the stifling heat, the kind that often signals the approach of a storm, Juan simply sighed and mopped his brow. The pair continued riding for several hours in silence.

Juan then realized he was back in familiar territory, for they were now on the stretch of road he had traveled only a week ago—though how much longer it now seemed to him. He jumped off Don Teodosio’s horse and broke into a run.

This time the gold would not escape him! But he had to move quickly, so he could find shelter before the storm broke.

Out of breath, Juan finally reached Doña Josefa’s hut. She was standing by the door, shaking her head slowly as she surveyed the ransacked house.
“So I’ve caught up with you at last!” Juan shouted, startling the old woman. “Where’s the gold?”

“The gold coin?” Doña Josefa said, surprised and looking at Juan intently. “Have you come for the gold coin? I’ve been trying hard to give it to someone who might need it,” Doña Josefa said. “First to an old man who had just gotten over a bad attack. Then to a young woman who had been running a fever. Then to a man with a broken leg. And finally to Don Teodosio’s wife. But none of them would take it. They all said, ‘Keep it. There must be someone who needs it more.’”

Juan did not say a word.

“You must be the one who needs it,” Doña Josefa said.

She took the coin out of her pocket and handed it to him. Juan stared at the coin, speechless.

At that moment a young girl appeared, her long braid bouncing as she ran. “Hurry, Doña Josefa,
please!” she said breathlessly. “My mother is all alone, and the baby is due any minute.”

“Of course, dear,” Doña Josefa replied. But as she glanced up at the sky, she saw nothing but black clouds. The storm was nearly upon them. Doña Josefa sighed deeply.

“But how can I leave now? Look at my house! I don’t know what has happened to the roof. The storm will wash the whole place away!”

And there was a deep sadness in her voice.

Juan took in the child’s frightened eyes, Doña Josefa’s sad, distressed face, and the ransacked hut.

“Go ahead, Doña Josefa,” he said. “Don’t worry about your house. I’ll see that the roof is back in shape, good as new.”

The woman nodded gratefully, drew her cloak about her shoulders, and took the child by the hand. As she turned to leave, Juan held out his hand.

“Here, take this,” he said, giving her the gold coin. “I’m sure the newborn will need it more than I.”
Junior Great Books®
READER’S JOURNAL

BOOK ONE
Relationships
Kindness
Confidence

This journal belongs to:

The Great Books Foundation
A nonprofit educational organization
Write about a part of the story that you understand better after the sharing questions activity.

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Write the question someone else asked that interests you the most.

____________________________

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____________________________
Write something new you learned from rereading or from doing an activity during the second reading.

____________________________________________________________________

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____________________________________________________________________

Write a question you’d like to talk about more. It can be a question you thought of already or a new question. You can write more than one question if you wish.

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____________________________________________________________________
Choose one of the topics in the clouds and write or draw a picture about it.

- A picture of Doña Josefa taking care of a sick person
- A picture of the gold coin
- A time you wanted something you didn’t have
- How you felt at the end of the story
The focus question: 

Your answer before discussion: 

A piece of evidence from the story that supports your answer: 

Your answer after discussion (explain how you changed or added to your original answer):
Write your answer to the assigned essay question, and write three pieces of evidence from the story that support your answer.

Your answer to the assigned essay question:

Evidence #1 from page ______: 

How this evidence supports your answer:

Your evidence can be a quote from the story or a summary of what happens in your own words.

Explain how this piece of evidence supports your answer to the essay question.
Use these notes to write an essay. Each main paragraph of your essay should give a piece of evidence and an explanation of how it supports your answer.
Write a question you had about the story that still hasn’t been answered. Use this page to take notes for a short story that answers your question.

Your question:

NOTES

BEGINNING: Where and when does this story happen? Who are the characters?

MIDDLE: What problems or important events happen?

END: Are the problems solved? What happens to the characters?
Junior Great Books Series 2–5

Series 2, Book One

THEME: FRIENDSHIP
The Happy Lion  Louise Fatio
Miss Maggie  Cynthia Rylant
Anancy and Dog and Puss and Friendship  West Indian folktale as told by James Berry

THEME: RESPONSIBILITY
Catalog Cats/Our Garden (from The Stories Julian Tells)  Ann Cameron
Carlos and the Cornfield  Jan Romero Stevens
The Wedding Basket  West African folktale as told by Donna L. Washington

THEME: BRAVERY
The Jade Stone  Chinese folktale as told by Caryn Yacowitz
The Girl and the Chenoo  Native American folktale as told by Joseph Bruchac and Gayle Ross
Jack and the Beanstalk  English folktale as told by Joseph Jacobs

Series 2, Book Two

THEME: GENEROSITY
Erandi’s Braids  Antonio Hernández Madrigal
The Invisible Hunters  Nicaraguan folktale as told by Harriet Rohmer
Fishing Day  Andrea Davis Pinkney

THEME: COMMUNITY
Perfect Crane  Anne Laurin
Hurricane Flowers  Ethel Pochocki
My Great-Grandmother’s Gourd  Cristina Kessler

THEME: BEING YOURSELF
The Wise Little Toad  Rosario Ferré
Doodle Flute  Daniel Pinkwater
The Velveteen Rabbit  Margery Williams

Series 3, Book One

THEME: RELATIONSHIPS
Boundless Grace  Mary Hoffman
The Scarebird  Sid Fleischman
Chin Yu Min and the Ginger Cat  Jennifer Armstrong

THEME: KINDNESS
The Gold Coin  Alma Flor Ada
The Magic Listening Cap  Japanese folktale as told by Yoshiko Uchida
The Mushroom Man  Ethel Pochocki

THEME: CONFIDENCE
The Banza  Haitian folktale as told by Diane Wolkstein
The Upside-Down Boy  Juan Felipe Herrera
The Ugly Duckling  Hans Christian Andersen

Series 3, Book Two

THEME: GRATITUDE
White Wave  Chinese folktale as told by Diane Wolkstein
Luba and the Wren  Ukrainian folktale as told by Patricia Polacco
Basho and the River Stones  Tim Myers

THEME: CLEVERNESS
The Dream Weaver  Concha Castroviejo
The Man Whose Trade Was Tricks  Georgian folktale as told by George and Helen Papashvily
The Emperor’s New Clothes  Hans Christian Andersen

Series 4, Book One

THEME: TRUST
Thank You, M’am  Langston Hughes
Crow Call  Lois Lowry
Fresh  Philippa Pearce

THEME: RESOURCEFULNESS
Shrewd Todie and Lyzer the Miser  Ukrainian folktale as told by Isaac Bashevis Singer
On Sand Island  Jacqueline Briggs Martin
The Green Man  Gail E. Haley

THEME: COMMUNICATION
Song of Hope  Peggy Duffy
Jean Labadie’s Big Black Dog  French-Canadian folktale as told by Natalie Savage Carlson
Thunder, Elephant, and Dorobo  African folktale as told by Humphrey Harman

Series 4, Book Two

THEME: STRENGTH
Tuesday of the Other June  Norma Fox Mazer
Doesn’t Fall Off His Horse  Virginia A. Stroud
The Cello of Mr. O  Jane Cutler

THEME: HONESTY
The No-Guitar Blues  Gary Soto
The Fire on the Mountain  Ethiopian folktale as told by Harold Courlander and Wolf Leslau
Ooka and the Honest Thief  Japanese folktale as told by I. G. Edmonds

THEME: PERSPECTIVE
The Old Woman and the Wave  Shelley Jackson
Letting Swift River Go  Jane Yolen
The Apple and the Envelope  Herbert Montgomery

Series 5, Book One

THEME: HONESTY
Charles  Shirley Jackson
The Special Powers of Blossom Culp  Richard Peck
The Peddler’s Gift  Maxine Rose Schur

THEME: SELF-RESPECT
In the Time of the Drums  Gullah folktale as told by Kim L. Siegelson
Learning the Game  Francisco Jiménez
The Invisible Child  Tove Jansson

THEME: FITTING IN
The Coming of the Surfman  Peter Collington
All Summer in a Day  Ray Bradbury
A Game of Catch  Richard Wilbur

Series 5, Book Two

THEME: FAMILY
Kamau’s Finish  Muthoni Muchemi
Ghost Cat  Donna Hill
The Hemulen Who Loved Silence  Tove Jansson

THEME: HUMILITY
The Enchanted Sticks  Steven J. Myers
Kaddo’s Wall  West African folktale as told by Harold Courlander and George Herzog
The Prince and the Goose Girl  Elinor Mordaunt

THEME: COMPASSION
A Bad Road for Cats  Cynthia Rylant
Lenny’s Red-Letter Day  Bernard Ashley
Through the Mickle Woods  Valiska Gregory