

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

The Great Books Foundation provides strong, inquiry-based English language arts programs for grades K–12 that improve students’ academic achievement. The Foundation uses the Shared Inquiry™ method to develop critical thinking skills, foster civil discourse, and build authentic learning opportunities through dialogue and active listening. Great Books programs combine classroom materials and the Shared Inquiry method to develop student competencies, which directly align with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English Language Arts and Reading.

Great Books programs and the TEKS share the belief that **listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking are interconnected skills that build on each other**. Our approach allows students to acquire the habits and strategies of **self-directed critical thinkers**, readers, and writers who thrive in collaborative settings. *ELL students in particular* benefit from our program because of its strong and sustained oral component and its focus on open-ended questions. In fact, our curriculum includes suggestions on how to differentiate instruction to best support all learners.

The chart below compares the TEKS for English Language Arts and Reading introduction with the characteristics of Great Books programs.

Great Books Programs	TEKS Introduction
<p>Speaking and Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Inquiry emphasizes student accountability and decreased teacher talk, which provides an opportunity for teachers to model speaking and listening. • Teachers are trained to ask students questions to deepen students’ responses to one another. • Our curriculum and training provide guidelines that support student engagement and active listening. • In all of our lessons, students are encouraged to respond directly to their peers. • All activities in our programs align with the social and emotional learning competencies outlined by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL).¹ 	<p>Speaking and Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strands focus on academic oracy (proficiency in oral expression and comprehension). (I.1) • Speaking, listening, and thinking are interconnected. (I.1) • Students develop high levels of social and academic language proficiency. (I.2) • ELLs can and should be encouraged to use their first language to ensure academic development in English. (I.4) • Oral language skills are the cornerstone of school success (I.6) • Verbal engagement must be maximized across grade levels. (I.6)

1. See more information on our alignment with CASEL [here](#).

Great Books Programs	TEKS Introduction
<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students encounter rich texts that represent multiple genres and a range of diverse voices. • Students are prompted to explore a text multiple times so that decoding and encoding support their independent critical thinking. • Each lesson features structured and flexible activities to promote vocabulary acquisition. • Students are given opportunities to annotate, act out, and sequence complex texts, deepening their understanding. • Our curriculum and our methodology promote in-depth analysis of open-ended questions so that students are able to weigh their ideas and evidence, while developing their independent thinking skills. • Our approach requires students to use evidence from the text to support their ideas, leading to strongly rooted ideas and intellectually rigorous discourse. 	<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are exposed to multiple genres and asked questions about the author’s craft and purpose. (I.1) • Decoding is internalized when tactile and kinesthetic opportunities (encoding) are provided. (I.2) • Students build metacognitive skills by exploring complex texts. (I.3) • Texts feature sophisticated sentence structures, nuanced text features, cognitively demanding content, and subtle relationships among ideas (I.3) • All students, especially ELLs, must encounter vocabulary in a meaningful context. (I.5) • Instruction for ELLs must be linguistically accommodated to allow students to navigate open-ended questions and demonstrate English language proficiency. (I.5)
<p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing assignments are an authentic extension of the Shared Inquiry process, in which students have the opportunity to develop their thoughts about complex questions before focusing on writing structure. • Each of our lessons provides an opportunity for students to express their ideas in writing while using academic vocabulary. • Our materials are scaffolded so that students are supported as they revise and deepen their ideas when editing (e.g., with graphic organizers). • Students have multiple formal writing options, including persuasive, argumentative, reflective, and creative. 	<p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strands focus on reflective writing. (I.1) • Students should read and write on a daily basis with opportunities for cross-curricular content. (I.2) • ELLs are given multiple opportunities to demonstrate their English proficiency in writing. (I.5) • Students must have multiple opportunities to practice and apply academic language in both speaking and writing. (I.6)

Additionally, the Great Books Foundation’s professional development options offer concrete, step-by-step instruction on how to use the Shared Inquiry method, and they fully align with the TEKS. Great Books offers a variety of customized courses, K–12 classroom materials, and consultation services. For more information, contact us at 800.222.5870, or visit greatbooks.org.

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