



Junior Great Books

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Junior Great Books is a professional development program designed to help teachers develop inquiry-based instructional strategies in reading, literary analysis, and critical thinking. The shared inquiry method develops students' reading, communication, and thinking skills. Shared inquiry engages students in lively, structured discussion of authentic literature. During the discussions students engage in a genuine investigation to find the meaning of the literary piece being discussed. Written and oral interpretive activities supplement the structured search for meaning and can be applied in every stage of the reading and writing process.

The staff development provided for teachers, administrators, volunteers, and parents focuses on developing skills to conduct shared inquiry with students and using the interpretive activities to extend the search for meaning. The Great Books Foundation has excellent collections of student literature to use in the shared inquiry process and also provides teacher resource materials to support the implementation of Junior Great Books in classrooms.

The Junior Great Books Program has been used in schools throughout the country since 1962. The program was certified as an effective program by the National Diffusion Network, U.S. Department of Education, in 1992.

Content

- shared inquiry
- literary analysis and interpretation
- critical and creative thinking skills
- use of Junior Great Books literature

Context

- wide range of states, districts, and schools
- diverse student populations
- supplement to or replacement of regular curriculum

PROGRAM CONTEXT

Junior Great Books has been implemented throughout the country in all types of schools and with all levels of students. The specific studies described in the "Evidence of Increased Student Achievement" section of this abstract were conducted in urban settings with a large number of minority students and in suburban schools with limited diversity.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



Junior Great Books Program involves several levels of training and support for classroom teachers. The Basic Leader Training Course is a beginning level, two-day course that provides concrete, step-by-step instruction in how to use the shared inquiry method with Junior Great Books materials. This course prepares teachers to lead a shared inquiry discussion and daily interpretive activities with students of all ability levels. Specifically, the training focuses on the questioning and listening strategies to keep discussions lively and focused, follow-up questions to help children develop and support their own ideas, techniques for meeting the needs of students of all ability levels, and before-and after-discussion activities to reinforce reading and discussion and to build children's thinking and writing skills.

In addition to the Basic Leader Training Course, intermediate and advanced level workshops are available for those who wish to explore integrating Junior Great Books interpretive activities into the classroom curriculum and to learn how to assess student writing and discussions.

Training is provided by the Great Books Foundation staff throughout the United States and is arranged through the Junior Great Books Foundation.

On-site follow-up and consultation is also available to provide school-based support, including classroom coaching and demonstration lessons for those implementing shared inquiry and interpretive activities.

Process

- training
- demonstration
- analysis of Junior Great Books materials
- integration of Junior Great Books into existing curriculum
- classroom-based coaching
- consultation and support

Intended Audience

- entire school
- entire department
- individual volunteer teachers

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The Junior Great Books Program improves students' critical reading, literary analysis, and critical thinking processes as a result of engaging in shared inquiry.

EVIDENCE OF INCREASED STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT



Success Indicators

- Norm-referenced reading assessments
- Ross Test of Higher-Order Thinking Skills
- Worden Critical Thinking/Reading Appraisal

Two studies document the success of the Junior Great Books Program in increasing student achievement. A recent study by David Kerbow of the University of Chicago's Center for School Improvement determined that students' ability in reading comprehension increased as a result of their participation in Junior Great Books. 51 teachers in 11 schools in the Chicago Public Schools who participated in the Junior Great Books training in 1995-96 are included in the study. Students in Junior Great Books classrooms outperformed the control students at all grades with statistically significant results at fifth grade ($p < .01$) and eighth grade ($p < .001$). Control classrooms were matched with Junior Great Books classrooms based on similar achievement level in prior grade levels with similar racial composition in schools with comparable percentage of low income students.

A second study examined the impact of the Junior Great Books shared inquiry process on high ability fifth-graders. Students whose teachers used Junior Great Books as either a full-time or part-time replacement for the regular basal reading program performed significantly better on the Ross Test of Higher Order Cognitive Processes and the Worden Critical Thinking/Reading Appraisal. Students in control classrooms were matched to those in Junior Great Books classrooms based on reading ability and socio-economic status.

Other evidence indicates that Junior Great Books increased students' performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills in areas of generalizations and inferences and relationships and outcomes.

The longevity of the Junior Great Books program (37 years), continuous improvements to the program over time, extensive nationwide implementation, and the availability of multiple measures of reading performance make it easy to substantiate the claim that this staff development program improves student achievement in the language arts. The program has been used in schools throughout the United States since 1962 with remarkable results. Few staff development programs can match the history of success of Junior Great Books.

THE BOTTOM LINE



SAMPLE SITES



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KEY CONTACT PERSON . . .

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DOCUMENTATION

- Bird, J. (1984). *Effects of Fifth Graders' Attitude and Critical Thinking/Reading Skills Resulting from a Junior Great Books Program*. Unpublished dissertation. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.
- Biskin, D., Hoskisson, K. & Modlin, M. (1976). Prediction, reflection, and comprehension. *The Elementary School Journal*, 77, 132-139.
- Kerbow, D. (1997). *Preliminary Evaluation of Junior Great Books Program Chicago Elementary Schools: 1995-1996 School Year*. Unpublished manuscript. Chicago: Center for School Improvement, University of Chicago.

