NOTES – JUNIOR GREAT BOOKS EVENING WORKSHOP – 10/23/13

Great Books Foundation: [www.greatbooks.org](http://www.greatbooks.org) : lots of information about the program, help for parents, etc.

**JGB** is a great program for teaching deep **critical thinking** about books. This aligns perfectly with the new Common Core state tests.

**Guest:** Coach who trains the teachers Fred Hang ([fred.hang@greatbooks.org](mailto:fred.hang@greatbooks.org) - “feel free to send me an email if you have any questions”).

Fred is with the **Great Books Foundation**, educational non-profit based in Chicago. Legacy of the work of Mortimer Adler and the University of Chicago’s great books program, started around 1950.

**Slide:** Critical Thinking: Idea, Evidence, Response

* **Idea:** Every student has ideas worth hearing, and these ideas should be heard.
* **Evidence:** You must be able to substantiate/support your ideas by making connections to text or life.
* **Response:** My ideas aren’t the only ones in the world. I should be able to hear and respond to ideas that differ from my own.

**Three essential features of Great Books Programs:** Outstanding literature (above grade level), Shared Inquiry, Interpretive activities

* **Oustanding literature:** diverse, global, challenging
* **Shared Inquiry:** A method of learning characterized by a focus on rich content (texts that are complex, ambiguous, and raise questions that *the teacher can’t answer.*) Consistent use of open-ended questions and a collaborative search for understanding.
  + Students have to read these texts closely, deeply to engage meaningfully in discussion.
  + By end of discussion, nobody has the “one right answer”, everybody has a deeper understanding of the text.
* **Interpretive activities**

**Great Books Activities:**

**Session 1:** Pre-reading, First Reading, Sharing questions

1. Pre-reading (make a personal connection to a complex text you’re about to hear.
2. First reading always OUT LOUD.
3. Immediately after, students can ask and post questions which are referred back to throughout the week.

**Session 2:** Second reading with directed notes: Students take careful notes

* Reinforces the importance of rereading & taking notes
* Students then share their notes.

**Session 3:** Shared inquiry discussion

**Session 4:** Writing – backing up their ideas with evidence, addressing a

wider audience.

**Group Activity for Workshop participants: Tolstoy very short story – a mini Great Books Session**

**Story summary:** Two brothers find a stone on which is written an inscription – “go grab 2 bear cubs and run all the way up the mountain to a house and you will find true happiness within it.” Brother 1 is risk-averse. Brother 2 is an optimist.

Brother 2 follows the inscription and is made king of the town. A year later he is deposed. Wandering, he runs into brother 1. B1 is complacent and content, living a simple existence. B2 is glad for his memories, though not all were happy.

**Pre-reading Prompt:**

**Part 1:** Imagine this – your best friend is about to go on the adventure of a lifetime. There’s some risk involved, but they’ll never get such a chance again. How would you convince your friend?

* Audience members share their thoughts.

**Part 2:** What if it’s too risky? How would you talk them out of it?

* I’d put it in the context of family…their parents would miss them…

**First reading:** out loud

**Sharing questions:** We asked our initial questions out loud. Some literal, some more speculative.

**Directions before 2nd reading:** Put the letter ‘a’ any place where you approve of what a brother says or does and a ‘d’ any place you disapprove.

(in the lower grades, 2nd reading might be a read-aloud too, or on professional CD).

* We then discussed our notes – where we put ‘a’ and where ‘d’ and why.
* Discussion leader pushed us to elaborate, explain, **disagree** (if one person put ‘a’ in a certain spot, who else put ‘d’ there? And why?)
  + Disagreement is extraordinarily valuable for understanding other points of view, thinking about issues from all sides.

**Before Discussion:** Leader asks a question, everybody writes an answer.

[See “Handout – Junior Great Books Worksheet]

**Discussion Guidelines:**

1. Read the text before the discussion
2. Discuss only the selection everyone has read
3. Support your ideas with evidence
4. Listen and respond to others directly
5. Expect the leader only to ask questions (leader/teacher can’t affirm or redirect kids “nice answer!” or “well….”)

\* students don’t raise their hands (trying to get attention). Instead they really have to listen to each other and respond.

**After discussion:** Reflect on how your answer was reflected by the discussion

THE QUESTION: Does the writing on the stone tell the truth?

**Discussion:** Everybody sat in a circle and discussed their thoughts. The discussion became quite lively, with people feeding off of one another’s answers.

**What about shy/introverted kids?**

* Students write first, so everyone has something to share.
* Teacher encourages and facilitates participation

**As Parents, what can we do?**

* Try to engage your kids with open-ended questions (on current events, about things you see, things that happen in daily life), not just factual or right/wrong questions.

All but 4 TAG teachers have been trained by Fred. They remaining four are being trained in November.

*Example of a JGB handout for classrooms:*

Building Your Answer in Shared Inquiry Discussion

Name:

Selection:

Your leader’s opening question:

Your answer before discussion:

How did discussion affect your answer? Did it change your mind? Provide additional support for your answer? Make you aware of additional issues?

Your answer after discussion:

What in the selection helped you decide on this answer?