

Criteria for Choosing Great Books Selections

Great Books Foundation selections must meet certain criteria to be suitable for Shared Inquiry™ discussion. All the content published in Great Books anthologies has been tested by the Foundation's staff, by teachers and students, and by Great Books book groups who have used the selections successfully in Shared Inquiry discussions.

Selections must support extended interpretive discussion.

Shared Inquiry discussion asks readers to search a text for meaning, so it must support multiple interpretations. Many well-written works are unsuitable for Shared Inquiry discussion because their meaning or intention is explicit, or because the questions they raise cannot be answered with evidence from the text.

Selections must raise genuine questions for adults as well as students.

Shared Inquiry is a collaboration between the leader and participants, so leaders must bring to the discussion genuine curiosity about ideas in the text that are of interest to them. Selections for students must satisfy the curiosity of adults as well as younger readers, and be rich enough to raise issues that everyone can think about from his or her own perspective.

Selections must be limited in length.

Critical thinking requires that the reader examine details, make connections, and draw conclusions from close, attentive readings, preferably over several days. Short stories, essays, poems, novellas, audio recordings, and videos are well suited to Shared Inquiry discussion. With longer works, such as novels, Shared Inquiry is more satisfying when using excerpts—a few chapters or even just a few pages—that are sufficiently strong to stand alone.

Selections must be age appropriate.

The themes and issues presented in Great Books selections are within the level of maturity and experience of the recommended age group. At the same time, the selections open new worlds for students; they reveal the familiar in new ways and present something new in ways that are familiar. Because we choose selections that pique the curiosity of both the leader and students, Great Books selections are particularly well suited for bridging different proficiency levels within the classroom.

Selections and authors must represent a variety of cultures.

Within each collection of texts we offer, readers should be able to see characters and situations that reflect their own identities, as well as characters and situations that present cultures different from their own. Because the goal of Great Books programs is to create collaborative communities in which questioning, listening, and curiosity are valued, it is crucial that readers have the opportunity to encounter diverse authors and explore texts that mirror the wide range of human experiences.

For more information about Great Books programs, contact your educational consultant at 800-222-5870 or visit greatbooks.org.

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