

# Using Junior Great Books to Meet the NAEP Reading Assessment Goals for 2024

According to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), “The ability to read critically and analytically is crucial for effective participation in America’s democratic society” (xiii). We can help your students with this goal of the NAGB and succeed in what the assessment measures.

The Great Books Foundation is a 75-year-old independent, nonprofit educational organization that creates reading and discussion programs for students, teachers, and adult learners. We believe that literacy and critical thinking help form reflective, knowledgeable citizens equipped to participate constructively in a democratic society. Our leaders and learners engage in work that entails “a complete answer [that] requires a clear analysis or coherent argument supported by sound evidence from the text.”<sup>1</sup>

We will focus on how using Shared Inquiry™, the instructional methodology used in Junior Great Books® programs, can impact your classroom in the ways called for by the NAGB’s [Reading Assessment Framework](#). The framework defines reading as an active and complex process that involves:

- Understanding written text
- Developing and interpreting meaning
- Using meaning as appropriate to the type of text, purpose, and situation

The framework includes two text types: literary texts (including poetry, fiction, and literary non-fiction) and informational texts.

The document details the item design as follows. The framework includes the following cognitive targets, or behaviors and skills, for items from both literary and informational texts:

- Locate and Recall
- Integrate and Interpret
- Critique and Evaluate

These cognitive targets illustrate the complex nature of the reading process, whereas the corresponding behaviors highlight the different behaviors elicited by different text types. To measure these cognitive skills, students will respond to both selected-response and constructed-response items with varying distributions of question type by grade level.<sup>2</sup> In Junior Great Books, students work on these skills through a variety of activities in the classroom. This work prepares students to tackle any question type. “Starting with the 2017 assessment, students engage with both selected-response and constructed-response items in a digital platform.”<sup>3</sup>

Junior Great Books and Shared Inquiry fit into this philosophy easily as follows:

## 1. The definition of reading from the framework is very similar to that of Shared Inquiry.

NAGB Reading Framework	Shared Inquiry
<p>An active and complex process that involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding written text</li> <li>• Developing and interpreting meaning</li> <li>• Using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation<sup>4</sup></li> <li>• Reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) are demonstrated through students' ability to read passages and questions with minimal effort.<sup>5</sup></li> </ul>	<p>An active and collaborative search for meaning to a question(s) of meaning raised by a text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students use their ability to understand a written text to develop a claim about the text and find evidence from the text to support their claim.</li> <li>• Students are given at least two readings of a text (one orally and one with a close reading activity).</li> </ul>

Since the definition is a starting point in the research and development of a curriculum, this similarity between the two is not insignificant. Using a methodology with these echoes of the reading framework will ensure that you are addressing those skills and cognitive behaviors.

## 2. Reading Behaviors

NAGB Reading Framework	Shared Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform an overview of the text to tune in to what needs their attention.</li> <li>• Interpret and evaluate the text.</li> <li>• Acquire understanding, adjusting initial hypotheses about the text based on new information and deeper understanding of the text.</li> <li>• Use the ideas and information from the text to expand thinking.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use prereading activities to help readers form a bridge into the text.</li> <li>• Use open-ended interpretive questions to allow students to make their own interpretation about a text.</li> <li>• Working with peers and a leader, explore other hypotheses about a text using textual evidence to support thinking.</li> <li>• In writing, take the interpretive work done in discussion and then evaluate how it can affect students' views and beliefs.</li> </ul>

## 3. Selected Reading Passages

It should be noted that the test does not allow for the text to be read aloud to the students as accommodation, as they are looking to test for reading, not listening, comprehension. The assessment will use texts representative of the type of reading students will face both in and out of school. The passages will incorporate reading for information and pleasure.

NAGB Reading Framework	Shared Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The test presents students with bias-free informational or literary texts.</li> <li>• Students will read only in English and be asked to answer constructed or selected-response questions.</li> <li>• Passages will span diverse areas and topics and will be as engaging as possible to the full range of students in the grades assessed.<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses texts that raise questions answerable with evidence from the text</li> <li>• Requires close reading and familiarity with details</li> <li>• Included in our anthologies:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Short stories, poems, novellas, and excerpts from novels that can stand alone</li> <li>» Essays, speeches, primary source texts, and short nonfiction texts</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Because Shared Inquiry is about the discussion of ideas, texts chosen for a designated age group must be:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Appropriate for the maturity level of the group</li> <li>» Accessible given the group’s life experiences</li> <li>» Engaging and relatable</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

#### 4. Assessment Structure

##### Reading Passages

The test measures students’ ability to read a variety of texts for different purposes. By exposing your students to the wide variety of literature found within the Great Books anthologies for all grade levels, you will be preparing your students for the types of reading activities that the assessment measures and that life demands. Utilizing Shared Inquiry and the Junior Great Books sequence of activities will help your students learn to discern the types of literary devices included in the NAGB assessment. And since the NAGB reading assessment uses only authentic texts, your students will gain the skills, confidence, and knowledge that have been deemed necessary to be considered competent readers.

NAGB Reading Framework	Shared Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literary works               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Fiction</li> <li>» Poetry<sup>8</sup></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Literary nonfiction               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Personal essay</li> <li>» Autobiography</li> <li>» Speeches</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports deep inquiry and close reading</li> <li>• Includes a variety of texts, such as fiction from many cultures and styles, nonfiction works, and poetry</li> </ul>

##### Cognitive Targets

Since the NAGB has concluded that reading involves “developing and interpreting meaning,” utilizing a teaching methodology that requires students to think interpretively about a text will help them meet that cognitive target. In Shared Inquiry, students are encouraged to think interpretively, make and develop a claim about a text, and support that claim with evidence. These skills will increase their ability on this assessment and develop reading and critical thinking skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.

NAGB Reading Framework	Shared Inquiry
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locate and Recall               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Appropriately find and use the main ideas and details from a text</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Integrate and Interpret               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Make comparisons</li> <li>» Examine texts</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Critique and Evaluate               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Synthesizes what they know about the text and its relationship to other works<sup>9</sup></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports ideas with evidence from the text</li> <li>• Text-to-self connections, text-to-text connections</li> <li>• Readers in Shared Inquiry are encouraged to interpret character motivation, author’s intent, and other cognitive skills measured by the assessment.</li> <li>• In Junior Great Books, teachers often ask evaluative questions about nonfiction texts or to wrap up interpretive discussions about works of fiction. Extension activities for fiction and nonfiction texts provide ample opportunity for evaluative work.</li> </ul>

At the Great Books Foundation, we take the comments from the framework seriously and to heart. We offer this comparison to Shared Inquiry as a way for you to support your students in meeting the goal set forth by the researchers and writers of the framework. “[T]he framework will provide a rich and accurate measure of the reading comprehension and analytical skills that students need both for their schooling and their lives. Development of these reading skills is the responsibility of all teachers—not only English teachers but also teachers across the curriculum—and also involves the expectations of parents and society. The Board hopes that this reading framework will serve not only as a significant national measure of how well students read but also as a catalyst to improve reading achievement for the benefit of students themselves and our nation.”<sup>10</sup>

1. “NAEP–Reading Framework for the 2007 National Assessment of Education Progress,” National Assessment Governing Board, updated July 23, 2021, <https://www.nagb.gov/content/dam/nagb/en/documents/publications/frameworks/reading/2007-reading-framework.pdf>.

2–10. Ibid.

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