

JUNIOR GREAT BOOKS



SERIES 6

FIRST SEMESTER

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PREFACE

SHARED INQUIRY

In Junior Great Books you will explore a number of outstanding stories. You will do this in a variety of ways: by taking notes as you read, by looking at important words and passages, and by sharing your questions and ideas about each story with your group. In each of these activities, you and your classmates will be working together with your teacher or leader, asking and answering questions about what the story means. You will be sharing what you discover with your classmates. This way of reading, writing, and discussion in Junior Great Books is called *shared inquiry*.

One of the good things about shared inquiry is that you can speak without worrying about whether what you say is “the right answer.” Different ideas and points of view can all lead to a better understanding of the story. When you speak, the leader may ask you to back up what you have said, or urge you to develop your idea further. Others in your class may also respond to what you say. They, too, may be asked to support their statements or explain them more clearly. After listening to what others say, you may change your mind about your answer. Shared inquiry gives you the chance to learn both from the author and from one another.

Sometimes you will focus on a small part of the story; at other times, you will think about the story as a whole.

Whether you are working on your own or with others, in shared inquiry you will develop *interpretations* of what you read—you will be working to discover what the author wants to tell you or make you feel through his or her words.

WHAT IS INTERPRETATION?

Good writers do their work with care. There are reasons for everything they put into their stories. They try to include only what has a point and what fits—things needed to make a story clear, to make it interesting, and to keep it moving along. They waste few words. In really good stories, everything fits. Everything has an explanation. The parts are connected and support one another just as the posts and beams in a building do.

The parts of the story, because they are connected, help to explain one another. Authors do not point out exactly how the parts are connected, nor do they say in so many words why everything in a story happens as it does. For one thing, that would make the story dull. For another, they want stories to be convincing—to seem like real life. In real life, few things that happen come complete with explanations. We have to puzzle out the explanations for ourselves.

Stories, too, ask us to work out many explanations for ourselves. And the answers to our questions are in the story, waiting to be found. Every good author puts into a story all that a reader must know to understand what is happening and why. As we figure out for ourselves why the things an author puts in a story are there, we are interpreting what we read. To interpret a story is to explain its meaning—what happens in it, and why, and what the story is about.

ACTIVE READING

You will need to think hard about the stories you read in Junior Great Books—not just about *what* happens but also about *why* it happens the way it does. You will be reading each story at least twice. When you read a story for the first time, your mind is mainly on the action—on what the characters think, do, and say. As you read, the main question you ask is likely to be “What’s going to happen next?” When you read a story for the second time, your mind will be free to raise new and different questions about it, and this will lead you to think of new questions to explore with your group. You will almost always notice details that you missed on your first reading, ones that can make you change your mind about why the characters behave as they do or how you feel about them. A second reading gives you the chance to think about the story as a whole without wondering what will happen next.

In shared inquiry, you will need to read with a pencil in hand and to make notes as you read. While you are reading, mark the words and passages in the story that strike you as really important, interesting, or surprising. Mark places that make you think of a question. Mark parts that give you ideas about what the story means. Your teacher or leader may also ask you to watch for particular things during your reading and to give them special attention. Your notes will remind you of your thoughts while reading and help you to find evidence to back up what you say.

QUESTIONS OF FACT, INTERPRETATION, AND EVALUATION

There are three kinds of questions that can be asked about a story in Junior Great Books: questions of fact, questions of interpretation, and questions of evaluation.

Questions of fact ask you to recall particular details or events from a story. Everything the author puts into the story is a fact in that story, even if some of the things couldn't happen in real life. In "Through the Tunnel," the first story in this book, many of the facts are very close to what we see in our daily lives, but in other stories they won't be. A question of fact has only one correct answer.

Knowing and remembering the facts in a story is important. They are the basis for your opinions about the story's meaning. And you will use them to support your opinions.

Many times a leader will ask a factual question in order to get you to back up what you have said with evidence from the story. Suppose someone says, "Jerry thinks he is old enough to go swimming by himself." A leader might then ask, *How old is Jerry?* This question can be answered by pointing to the place in the story that reads "He was an only child, eleven years old."

Now and then you will be asked a factual question that cannot be answered by looking at any one passage. For example, the question *Does Jerry's mother want him to be happy?* can only be answered "Yes." Although the story does not come right out and say so, her behavior shows that she does. Nothing in the story shows that she does not want him to be happy.

Questions of interpretation hold the central place in Junior Great Books. These are the questions that ask you to think carefully about what happens in a story and to consider what the story means. Unlike factual questions, they have more than a single good answer. Any answer that can be supported by factual evidence from the story will be a good one.

Some interpretive questions focus on a single passage or ask about a single event. Take, for example, this one: *Why does Jerry want to be with the other boys?* One answer is that he looks up to them because they are older. Another, that he feels lonely. Still another is that he recognizes that the boys are at home on this coast, and can let him in on its secrets.

Other, more basic interpretive questions are asked about the meaning of the story as a whole. The answers will often be drawn from several places in the story. Here is one basic interpretive question for “Through the Tunnel”: *Why does Jerry keep the tunnel a secret from his mother?* No one passage answers this question, but the author gives a number of clues about Jerry’s character: he wants badly to strike off on his own, he is worried about hurting his mother’s feelings, and he finds the idea of swimming through the tunnel frightening. Remembering each of these things will help you decide how to begin answering this question.

Questions of evaluation ask how the story fits with your own experience and, after you have interpreted it, whether or not you agree with what the story is saying. As you read “Through the Tunnel,” you might wonder, *Is it foolish to risk your life unnecessarily?* or *Wasn’t it wrong for Jerry to keep his plan a secret from his mother?* In answering questions like these, you will be thinking more about yourself and your beliefs than about the story itself. After reading the story, thinking

about evaluative questions can be a good way of deciding how you feel about the author's ideas.

Since understanding literature is the main purpose of Junior Great Books, you will spend most of your time considering questions of interpretation. Questions of fact will help you support your opinions about what a story means. Questions of evaluation will help you put yourself in the place of the characters in the story. You will have many chances to answer evaluative questions in your writing after Shared Inquiry Discussion.

SHARED INQUIRY DISCUSSION

After you have read a story twice, taken notes, and shared some of your questions with your classmates, you will be ready to participate in Shared Inquiry Discussion. Shared Inquiry Discussion begins when the discussion leader asks an interpretive question, a question that can have more than one good answer. The leader is not sure which answer is the best, and hopes to discover several good answers during the discussion. Because there can be more than one good answer, it takes many minds to discover and explore those answers fully. By asking questions, the leader seeks to help everyone in the group think for themselves about what the story means.

THE RULES OF SHARED INQUIRY DISCUSSION

1. **Only people who have read the story may take part in Shared Inquiry Discussion.** If you haven't read the story, you can't help others understand its meaning. Ideas that do not come from firsthand knowledge of the story will confuse the other members of the group.
2. **Discuss only the story everyone has read.** If you try to use other stories or personal experiences to explain your ideas, those who aren't familiar with them won't be able to join in the discussion.
3. **Do not use other people's opinions about the story unless you can back them up with evidence of your own.** When you take another person's word for what the story means, you have stopped thinking for yourself. This rule does not mean you may never use an idea you get from someone else. But make sure you understand the idea and can support it with factual details from the story.
4. **Leaders may only ask questions; they may not answer them.** Leaders never offer their own opinions. Instead, they share their questions about the story's meaning. This rule encourages you to do your own thinking about the story, and to remember that the leader really wants your help in understanding it.

In Shared Inquiry Discussion you may speak directly to anyone in the group, and not just to the leader. You may ask questions of anyone but the leader, and you will be answering questions that others ask you. Since you are all working together to search for a story's meaning, try to listen carefully when others are speaking. If you don't understand what they are saying, ask them to repeat their comments or explain them more clearly. If you disagree with what they are saying, you can tell them so, always giving your reasons. Sometimes, too, you will be able to support what another member of the group has said by giving a reason no one else has thought of.

By the end of a good discussion everyone in your group will understand the story better than they did before you began to exchange ideas, build on one another's insights, and work out new interpretations. At the close of a discussion, everyone will seldom agree in every detail on what the story means, but that's part of what makes it interesting and fun to discuss the stories in Junior Great Books.

WRITING YOUR OWN INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

Writing interpretive questions is one of the best ways to think on your own about the meaning of a story. After you have read a story twice and taken notes, you will be ready to begin turning your ideas into interpretive questions. Some of the good ways to find interpretive questions are listed here, together with questions that were written for “Through the Tunnel.”

Look for words or passages that you think are important and that you wonder about. One reader was puzzled by a word in this sentence: “And he almost ran after her again, feeling it unbearable that she should go by herself, but he did not.” The reader wrote this interpretive question:

When Jerry first goes to the rocks, why does he feel it “unbearable” that his mother should go to the beach by herself?

Look for parts of the story that you feel strongly about. As you read a story, ask questions about whatever makes you react with strong feelings. Look for places where you agree or disagree with the characters or with the author. For instance, one reader couldn’t believe it when Jerry shouted and wagged his ears at the older boys, knowing that it would make him look and feel foolish. She asked:

Why does Jerry keep trying to get the boys’ attention in a way that makes him feel ashamed?

When you are curious about why a character in the story acts the way he or she does, ask a question about that.

One reader, for example, was curious about Jerry's feelings when he swims out past the promontory to look for his mother on her beach. He wrote this question:

Why does being sure that his mother is there make Jerry feel both relieved and lonely?

Let questions come out of your ideas about the meaning of the story. As you read, keep asking yourself what the author wants you to think about and experience through his or her words. Ask questions about that. One reader wondered why "Through the Tunnel" focuses on Jerry's decision to do something so difficult and frightening. She asked:

Why does Jerry decide he must swim through the tunnel?

Interpretation begins with questions, the questions that come to you as you read. In working out the answers, you will arrive at a clearer idea of how the parts of the story fit together and have a better idea of its meaning.

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THROUGH THE TUNNEL

Doris Lessing

Going to the shore on the first morning of the vacation, the young English boy stopped at a turning of the path and looked down at a wild and rocky bay, and then over to the crowded beach he knew so well from other years. His mother walked on in front of him, carrying a bright striped bag in one hand. Her other arm, swinging loose, was very white in the sun. The boy watched that white naked arm, and turned his eyes, which had a frown behind them, towards the bay and back again to his mother. When she felt he was not with her, she swung around. "Oh, there you are, Jerry!" she said. She looked impatient, then smiled. "Why, darling, would you rather not come with me? Would you rather—" She frowned, conscientiously worrying over what amusements he might secretly be longing for, which she had been too busy or too careless to imagine. He was very familiar with that anxious,

apologetic smile. Contrition sent him running after her. And yet, as he ran, he looked back over his shoulder at the wild bay; and all morning, as he played on the safe beach, he was thinking of it.

Next morning, when it was time for the routine of swimming and sunbathing, his mother said, "Are you tired of the usual beach, Jerry? Would you like to go somewhere else?"

"Oh, no!" he said quickly, smiling at her out of that unfailing impulse of contrition—a sort of chivalry. Yet, walking down the path with her, he blurted out, "I'd like to go and have a look at those rocks down there."

She gave the idea her attention. It was a wild-looking place, and there was no one there; but she said, "Of course, Jerry. When you've had enough, come to the big beach. Or just go straight back to the villa, if you like." She walked away, that bare arm, now slightly reddened from yesterday's sun, swinging. And he almost ran after her again, feeling it unbearable that she should go by herself, but he did not.

She was thinking, Of course he's old enough to be safe without me. Have I been keeping him too close? He mustn't feel he ought to be with me. I must be careful.

He was an only child, eleven years old. She was a widow. She was determined to be neither possessive nor lacking in devotion. She went worrying off to her beach.

As for Jerry, once he saw that his mother had gained her beach, he began the steep descent to the bay. From where he was, high up among red-brown rocks, it was a scoop of moving blueish green fringed with white. As he went lower, he saw that it spread among small promontories and inlets