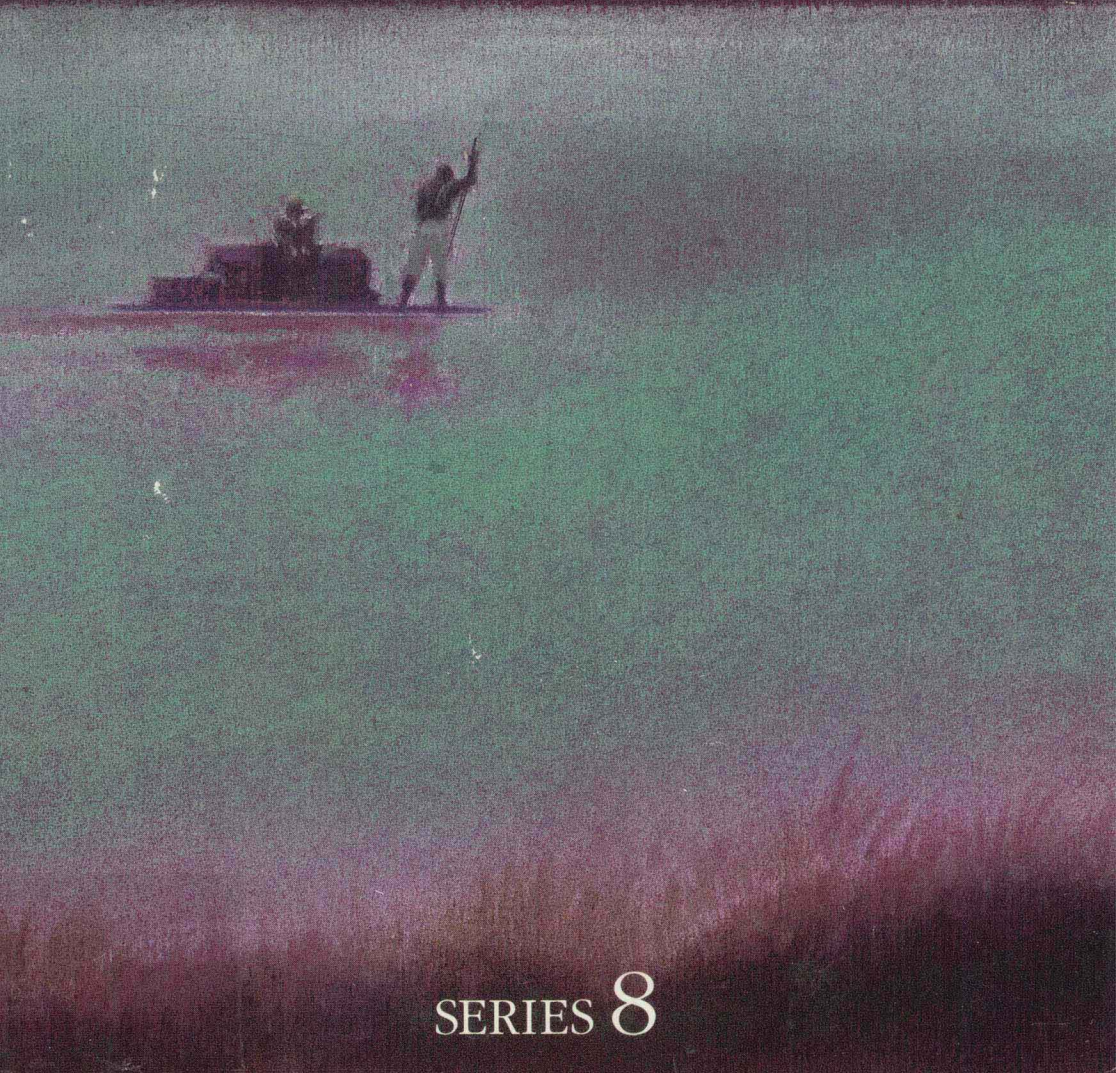


JUNIOR GREAT BOOKS



SERIES 8

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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 pleasures of 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. As you participate in shared inquiry, you will develop your own *interpretation* 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.

Some stories are simple and easy for us to understand. Others are more perplexing. In this second kind of story the author is trying to share with us ideas and feelings that are not obvious or easy to describe. You can fully understand such stories only if you actively seek their meaning out by asking questions.

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.

As you read the stories in Junior Great Books, many questions will probably occur to you. In some cases your first reading of a story will give you the answer to these questions. But often after the first reading you may find that some of your questions haven't been answered. You will need to look actively for the answers when you read the story again. The second reading will help you bring these questions into focus and begin to look for possible answers to them.

Reading actively is reading with a purpose—to answer your questions about the story and to discover new questions. By reading with a purpose you will be able to draw on all parts of the text and think about what it means as a whole.

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. The examples of each given below are from “Sucker,” the first story in this book.

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. 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, “Sucker is a lot younger than Pete.” A leader might then ask, *How old are Sucker and Pete?* This question can be answered by pointing to the place in the story where Pete says that Sucker is “twelve, four years younger than I am.” Pete himself must therefore be sixteen.

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 Sucker forgive Pete for treating him badly?* can only be answered “No.” Although the story does not come right out and say so, his behavior shows that he doesn’t. Nothing in the story shows that Sucker does forgive Pete.

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 Pete want to tell Maybelle that Sucker is his kid brother?* One answer is that he wants Maybelle to know that he and Sucker are closer than cousins usually are. Another is that Pete is proud of Sucker, now that Sucker no longer looks “timid and sort of like he was afraid of a whack over the head.” Still another answer is that Pete wants Maybelle to think of him as a mature “older brother.”

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 “Sucker”: *Why is the boys’ room more Sucker’s than Pete’s at the end of the story?* To answer this question, you need to think about the various changes that occur in Pete, in Sucker, and in their relationship throughout the whole story.

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 “Sucker,” you might wonder *Do people like Sucker invite others to treat them badly?* In answering a question like this, 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 have not read the story, you cannot contribute to the discussion because you are unprepared to offer opinions and to support them with evidence from the story.
- 2. Discuss only the story that everyone has read.** If you refer to other works of literature or your own personal experiences, the participants who are not familiar with them will not be able to contribute to the discussion. This rule also enables the group to check the validity of what is said by referring to the assigned story.
- 3. Do not introduce outside opinions unless you can back them up with evidence of your own.** If you get an idea about the meaning of a story from an outside source—for example, the opinion of someone you know or an insight from another book—you may bring it up in discussion only if you can express it in your own words and support it with evidence from the story.
- 4. Leaders may only ask questions; they may not answer them.** If leaders stated their own opinions about the meaning of a story, you might feel less inclined to think for yourself. You might also be less likely to believe that other equally good answers are possible. As a participant you are not limited to offering answers; you may ask questions, too.

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 worthwhile to discuss the stories in Junior Great Books.

WRITING YOUR OWN INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

The more you participate in shared inquiry, the more you will see problems of meaning in the selections you read. Writing interpretive questions is one of the best ways to think on your own about the meaning of a story. Some of your notes may already be in the form of interpretive questions; others can be developed into questions.

The same responses that lead you to make notes on a story can be good sources of interpretive questions. Some of these sources are listed here, together with questions developed for “Sucker.”

Look for words or passages that you think are important and that you wonder about. One reader was puzzled by Pete’s statement, “I’ve sometimes thought that if we could have it out in a big fight that would help.” He wrote this interpretive question:

Why does Pete feel that a big fight with Sucker might help to put things right between them?

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 felt strongly that Pete should have apologized to Sucker when he first realized that he had treated Sucker badly. She asked:

Why doesn’t Pete apologize to Sucker, even though he realizes that the way he treated Sucker was “awful”?

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 was curious about how Pete’s feelings have changed at the end of the story and why he doesn’t want to call his cousin “Sucker” anymore. He wrote:

Why doesn’t Pete want to call Sucker by his nickname at the end of the story?

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 thought that the author, Carson McCullers, might be suggesting that Pete is not entirely to blame for what happens in his friendship with Sucker. She wrote:

Is the situation with Sucker all Pete's fault?

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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SUCKER

Carson McCullers

It was always like I had a room to myself. Sucker slept in my bed with me but that didn't interfere with anything. The room was mine and I used it as I wanted to. Once I remember seeing a trap door in the floor. Last year when I was a sophomore in high school I tacked on my wall some pictures of girls from magazines and one of them was just in her underwear. My mother never bothered me because she had the younger kids to look after. And Sucker thought anything I did was always swell.

Whenever I would bring any of my friends back to my room all I had to do was just glance once at Sucker and he would get up from whatever he was busy with and maybe half smile at me, and leave without saying a word. He never brought kids back there. He's twelve, four years younger than I am, and he always knew without me even telling him that I didn't want kids that age meddling with my things.

Half the time I used to forget that Sucker isn't my brother. He's my first cousin but practically ever since I remember he's