



Great Books Donor Update

Local, regional, and national news in the Great Books community

The Great Books Foundation

www.greatbooks.org

September 2011

Announcing Vital Ideas: A New Great Books Series

The Great Books Foundation has just released the first four volumes in the new Vital Ideas series. Each anthology includes classic and contemporary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry focused on a single topic—work, crime, money, sex—and provides provocative material for both college students and general readers. All the selections are accompanied by interpretive questions for use in Shared Inquiry™ discussion.

The Vital Ideas series grew out of focus groups with dozens of Chicago-area college composition instructors. Many of these teachers expressed a need for topical anthologies of readings that would be relevant to the concerns of their students, many of whom are older with families and full-time jobs. We are confident that not only students, but all readers, will find the Vital Ideas series highly rewarding. For more information or to order, go to www.greatbooks.org/vitalideas.

Great Books on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter

Did you know that in addition to the Great Books blog, the Great Books Foundation is on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter? To find us, visit our home page at www.greatbooks.org and click on the appropriate icon in the upper right hand corner:



A longstanding Great Books group in Atlanta. Front row L to R: Elaine Herndon, Ruth Read, B. J. Smith, Jean Cooper, Paula Walker, Gerry de Harven. Back row L to R: Lee Pilgrim, Martha Norris, Ann Newman, Bill Lisenby.

Great Books Group Members Tell Their Stories

A big thank-you to the many people who called us after receiving our first Donor Update to share their experiences in Great Books groups. The response was inspiring! Here's some of what we heard.

Ruth Read and **B. J. Smith** from **Atlanta, Georgia**, started a Junior Great Books group in a local school, R. L. Hope Elementary, where Ruth's daughter was in sixth grade. Ruth and her husband, Henry, had been in a Great Books group for some time, and Ruth wanted her daughter to have the same experience reading and discussing great literature. After working together on the Junior Great Books program, B. J. and Ruth started another adult Great Books group. That group has been meeting at the Buckhead Branch of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library ever since.

And there's more. When Hope Elementary closed in the midnineties, B. J. started a Junior Great Books program in another Atlanta school—and some of the children from the original program at Hope became volunteers in the new program. Says B. J., who is 86, "At my age, I know how important it is to keep on thinking. It's important for the kids, too." Ruth concurs: "It should be in every school, the questioning is important for every student." To learn just how important, visit the Great Books blog

(continued on reverse)

Great Books Group Members Tell Their Stories, continued

at blog.greatbooks.org and read the post by Ruth's daughter, Lee Pilgrim. Lee writes about her memories growing up with parents who were in a Great Books group, and of her experiences in the Junior Great Books program that her mother helped to start so many years ago.

Another Great Books donor, **E. C. Burleson**, led and participated in Great Books groups for almost 20 years in **Richmond, Virginia**, and in **Hollywood, Florida**, before starting a Junior Great Books group at the Hollywood Central Elementary School in 2004. E. C. started leading groups of third and fourth graders. Now he's leading three groups of fifth graders, and he reports that the weekly discussions have had a significant impact on students' critical thinking. "I appreciate the quality of the selections," he says. "It's the best thing in the world that's happened to me. And you have to give back, especially with the kids."

Grace Crecelius in **Vashon, Washington**, near Tacoma, thinks our Donor Update is a great concept. And people other than donors should read it, too, says Grace. "I want to spread the word. I know how much fun it is, and I don't think people realize what a delightful experience it is to read and discuss this literature. It's a simple but remarkable idea." (We agree!)

Junior Great Books® Selected as Exemplary Program by Common Core

"While there is much about the current state of education in America to cause concern, there are also bright spots."

So says Common Core, a national nonprofit organization that works to improve education by promoting the teaching of a comprehensive liberal arts curriculum in America's K–12 schools. And the Junior Great Books program measures up, according to the group, by helping to "develop essential literacy skills." Junior Great Books was one of only three programs and five curricula chosen for recognition.

Great Books Programs and the Common Core State Standards

Despite the similarity in names, Common Core (see above) is not affiliated with the Common Core State Standards initiative, a state-led effort to create a national "common core" of K–12 language arts and math standards. The standards, which detail what students should learn in every grade, are intended to boost student achievement and ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared for college and work. Sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the initiative is to "provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them." Forty-four states have already signed on to adopt the standards.

The reading standards stress the use of increasingly complex texts, including both classic and contemporary literature. The speaking and listening standards emphasize discussion in a variety of settings. Because Great Books programs are particularly strong in these areas, they offer a powerful tool for schools to meet the standards. For more information about the Common Core State Standards, visit www.corestandards.org. For a complete alignment of Great Books programs with the standards, visit www.greatbooks.org/corestandards.

Blurbs from the Blog

Read these items on the Great Books Foundation Blog at blog.greatbooks.org:

- *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot, published by Crown (2010). Review by Deborah Bowles.
- *In the Basement of the Ivory Tower: Confessions of an Accidental Academic*, by Professor X, published by Viking (2011). Review by Nancy Carr.
- "How to Paint a Ceiling," poetry by Rachel Claff.

Read posts on books and education and tales from the field. Join the "great conversation" online by visiting today.

Coming Soon . . .

Taking Action, created by the editor of *The Civically Engaged Reader*, features more than 50 provocative essays, poems, and stories focusing on community involvement and public service.

Thank you for your generosity!

Please visit our website to see a list of donors to the 2010–2011 Great Books Annual Fund. We greatly appreciate your support!

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