

Supporting Educators with Text-Based Discussions



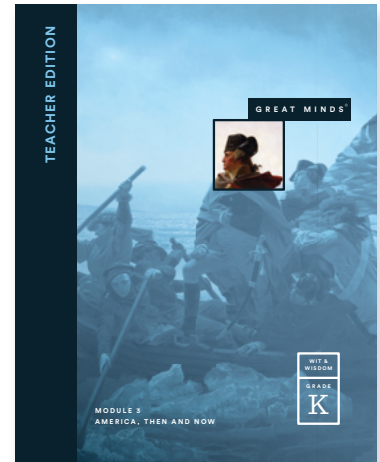
every child
is capable of
greatness

Wit & Wisdom® is a comprehensive Grades K–8 English language arts curriculum developed by and for teachers. Each *Wit & Wisdom* module centers on the study of rich and engaging texts, curated to build student knowledge of important ideas in the liberal arts and the sciences. The integrated and text-based approach—centered on exceptional texts—includes daily reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, and vocabulary study.

This document supports school and district leaders with the challenging work of navigating text-based discussion in Humanities classrooms. For the most thorough information about the design of *Wit & Wisdom*, please refer first to the [Implementation Guide](#). With a basic understanding of the Implementation Guide, leaders can use this document to plan for text-based discussions, prepare professional learning experiences, and engage families and community members around the core texts of *Wit & Wisdom*.

Any Humanities curriculum that aims to build knowledge inherently includes texts, topics, and tasks that explore the human condition. Subject matter related to personal identity, including race, religion, language, and culture may be sensitive or challenging to discuss with students in the care of schools and teachers. At times, subject matter related to content drawn from social studies or science may present opportunities to explore a variety of viewpoints and new or unfamiliar information.

At Great Minds®, we believe in the power of an exceptional teacher who can thoughtfully approach curriculum materials and best prepare learning experiences focused on thoughtful questions and engaging texts. The design of our materials supports the complex work of teaching content in the Humanities, while respecting the variety of perspectives and knowledge that students bring with them into the classroom.



Grade K, Module 3 Teacher Edition Cover

Using Curriculum Tools Effectively

WIT & WISDOM'S TEACHER EDITION

Frequently, teachers transition to high-quality instructional materials from planning their lessons based on a wide variety of resources. One feature of a high-quality curriculum is the embedded professional development within the instructional materials themselves, to ensure that teachers are developing the craft of teaching as they implement the materials. Educators are best positioned to internalize the curriculum when they develop a strong understanding of the features of the materials they use for instruction.

With the greatest respect for teachers, Great Minds designs instructional materials to guide the education of every student in the care of teachers across the country.

As a part of its instructional materials, *Wit & Wisdom* provides educators with a Teacher Edition (TE) for each of the four modules per grade level. The TE—available in print and digitally—is the source for teachers' study and preparation. The TE is not a script, but an educative guide for teachers to make important decisions about how to present material to students.

A complete guide to understanding the text features of the *Wit & Wisdom* TE is available on pages 29 through 36 in the [Wit & Wisdom Implementation Guide](#).

Especially when leading text-based discussions, it is helpful for educators to understand the design of some of the most supportive TE features.

- **Use of Questions:** Inquiry is essential to the design of *Wit & Wisdom* instruction. In many lessons, students generate their own questions for inquiry into texts. These questions help teachers facilitate meaningful learning as directed by the students, honoring the knowledge students bring into the classroom from their homes and communities. Additionally, teachers ask questions, written in bold print in each lesson, to help students clarify or deepen their understanding.
- **Possible Student Responses:** Possible student responses appear in italicized print in the TE. These responses help teachers prepare for what students may say during discussion or in response to a question. These examples are not exhaustive and do not capture the full range of possible student responses. Because all students enter into texts and tasks with a range of background experiences and foundational knowledge, they may contribute unanticipated new ideas or questions. Teachers may use these sample student responses to consider other questions to help students clarify their thinking when the initial question is challenging.
- **Teacher Notes:** Some lessons include Teacher Notes which provide additional considerations as teachers prepare lessons that include text discussion. When applicable, the Teacher Note offers additional guidelines for facilitating an unbiased and respectful class discussion or an additional resource or context for the instructional decisions made in the curriculum. Teacher Notes also alert teachers to sensitive language used in texts and these notes help teachers consider ways to prepare their students for the language used. If needed, teachers can decide to provide a general synopsis of the text section in question and then move on with instruction. Educators should consider the Teacher Note sections of a lesson as suggestions for implementation, but recognize that ultimately, they are trusted to make decisions that serve the needs of their students best.
- **Use of Language:** *Wit & Wisdom*'s teacher-writers carefully selected appropriate language to use throughout the TE. For example, whenever possible, the TE uses the tribal name to refer to indigenous American peoples. When not possible, the TE uses the terms Native Americans, American Indians, or indigenous Americans. If there is a preferred term in the school or community, educators should use those terms. If an educator is concerned about the language used in the Teacher Edition of *Wit & Wisdom*, please contact Great Minds at englishsupport@greatminds.org.

CORE TEXTS

As creators of knowledge-rich curriculum, *Wit & Wisdom*'s teacher-writers selected texts based on content, complexity, and craft, and the ability to build students' knowledge of important topics. The texts featured in *Wit & Wisdom* represent the best options available from trade book publishers at the time of the curriculum's creation. Future editions of the curriculum may include updates to text selections based on the current contributions of trade book publishers. Great Minds is dedicated to the continuous improvement of its materials for teachers and students and takes feedback about text selections within the curriculum products seriously. If an educator has feedback about a text, please encourage them to contact Great Minds at englishsupport@greatminds.org.

The design of texts at the center of instruction enables teachers to engage learners with important content in challenging and developmentally appropriate ways. In *Wit & Wisdom*, an exploration of the lived human experience

happens through reading authentic texts, many based on actual events, well-researched, and often, award-winning. *Wit & Wisdom* is not a history or science curriculum, but the content selected for many of the modules does convey human experiences from specific times and places, some of which may be unfamiliar for students and teachers alike. It is reasonable to expect that a history or science curriculum would further explore these topics.

To prepare for each module, teachers read the core texts and reflect on the question, “How does each text contribute to the knowledge students will build in this module?” This reflection question supports teacher’s comprehension of the text and prepares them to be more efficient users of the preparation protocols.

“How does each text contribute to the knowledge students will build in this module?”

Appendix A in each TE provides more information about the complexities of each text, including both its qualitative and quantitative complexity measures. Appendix A supports teachers in understanding how to use each core text within the module and prepare for how students will most effectively interact with each text.

When teachers encounter content in their reading of the core texts that may be sensitive to discuss in the classroom, they should note that concern for their work with the preparation protocols. Once teachers engage in the protocols, they may find the text content that was a concern on an initial reading of the text is no longer problematic because the Learning Goals, tasks, and assessments take priority and align students’ work to grade-level standards.

Wit & Wisdom does not offer options for replacing texts in any module. Lessons are written intentionally to support students’ understanding of the specific texts read in the module and cannot be easily adapted for alternate texts. Be clear with teachers, families, and community members whether the school or district has the capacity to provide alternate texts, as this will require a significant re-write or replacement of the curriculum. If the school or district does accommodate a text-replacement request in response to an individual family or for an entire school, be aware of the potential unintended consequences:

- Adequately meeting some standards or Learning Goals may not be possible with a replacement text;
- Students who opt-out of specific texts may face significant challenges with discussion tasks or written responses;
- Adaptation of the curriculum for a new text is a significant load and requires intensive changes to graphic organizers, text-dependent questions, and writing tasks, including assessments.

Supporting Classroom Educators

COLLABORATIVE PREPARATION

A benefit of adopting a common curriculum in a school or district is the opportunity for teachers across a grade level to study and prepare lessons together. In particular, when lessons address content that poses challenges to the teaching team, educators are able to collectively internalize the lesson and anticipate potential responses from students, families, and others in the community.

Three [preparation protocols](#) are available to all *Wit & Wisdom* teachers for free to use collaboratively to guide the study of modules, arcs, and lessons. Great Minds also offers a professional development session, [Module and Lesson Study](#), to support teachers with understanding how to use these protocols regularly to internalize the curriculum.

To support teachers with regular use of these protocols, school and district leaders should plan for the time and space for teachers to meet regularly to study modules, arcs, and lessons. Teachers should gather to conduct a module study protocol at least two weeks before the start of a module. Focusing Question Arc Study and Lesson Study are recommended on a regular basis during common planning or Professional Learning Community (PLC) time, especially in the first two to three years of implementation.

When teachers are preparing for text-based discussions, they may want to consider adding some of these reflection questions to their collaborative preparation work:

Module Study

- For this module, arc, or lesson, what do families need to know? What might be some proactive strategies for communicating with families about this text or topic?
- What additional supports might our students need to engage in this topic?
- Who in the community might positively contribute to our conversation about this text or topic? How can we invite them into our classrooms?

Focusing Question Arc Study

- What knowledge will students need to demonstrate by the end of this Focusing Question Arc? What are some strategies to maintain a focus on that knowledge throughout the arc?
- Would students benefit from an extended conversation or writing task based on the content in this arc of the module? If so, what norms and practices will support students in the extended learning experiences?
- What opportunities exist within this arc for students to demonstrate changes in their thinking about this text over time?

Lesson Study

- What additional student responses—beyond those already in the Teacher Edition—can we anticipate? How might we respond?
- What norms for conversation are already in place? Are there specific norms or expectations that need reinforcement before this conversation takes place?
- What kinds of follow-up questions will be supportive of students expressing their thinking about this text and content?

DELIBERATE PRACTICE

A supportive routine to prepare for facilitating text-based discussion is engaging in Deliberate Practice. In Deliberate Practice, a group of teachers engages in the following steps to practice facilitating a *Wit & Wisdom* lesson:

1. A group of teachers determines a critical section of a lesson they would like to practice. They select a small portion of the lesson—perhaps 5–10 minutes of instruction. The first teacher to deliver the lesson identifies an area where feedback would prove helpful.
2. The first teacher delivers the selected section of a lesson for their colleagues, who observe and participate as students.
3. The observing teachers reflect and jot down feedback, both strengths and opportunities.
4. Observing teachers share their feedback. The sharing of feedback can take place orally, in a Chalk Talk, or through another respectful and collegial method.
5. The teacher who facilitated the lesson reflects on the feedback, may ask questions of the observers, and then re-delivers the same section of the lesson incorporating the feedback.
6. Observers provide additional feedback.
7. The next teacher delivers the same section of the lesson.

Deliberate Practice is most effective with a coach or facilitator who can guide teachers through reflecting on their instructional choices. This work occurs to ensure students receive strong instruction that leads them to doing the majority of the heavy lifting in a lesson—not the teacher. With students at the center of the instruction, teachers can remain neutral facilitators leading students to deep thinking about the texts they read.

Engage Critical Stakeholders

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

When preparing to teach any module, educators need to plan how to best engage and connect with families. By sharing both the content of the instruction and the students' products from their learning, families will experience the positive results of a knowledge-building curriculum.

To support educators with communicating with families, Great Minds offers Family Tip Sheets in both English and Spanish for every *Wit & Wisdom* module. The Family Tip Sheets provide an overview of each module's content and texts. In addition to providing a recommended reading list for independent reading at home, the Family Tip Sheets also include questions to start conversations about the content students are learning at school.

Great Minds is currently translating Family Tip Sheets into additional languages and can be found on the Great Minds website as soon as they are complete. If you need support locating these translations, please email englishsupport@greatminds.org.

Consider some of these suggestions to engage families in their students' learning:

- Purchase additional core texts for families to check out and read alongside their student(s).
- Teach families how to use Fluency homework passages during a Family Literacy Night or through a Zoom conference. The Fluency passages are derived from module content and are often the most evidence-rich passages for speaking and writing tasks for students. When families understand how to support their students with this important and predictable work, students thrive.
- Share a list of virtual field trips or learning experiences that connect to the module with families. Often, families are impressed by how much their student has learned about a topic and the great questions they ask because of the knowledge they have built!
- Provide specific suggestions about community resources that benefit a specific module. For example, families might be encouraged to visit a local zoo during the study of Creature Features in Grade 1 or visit the site of a Japanese internment camp from World War II during the Americans All module in Grade 7. These experiences allow families to opt in to extending module content at their comfort level.
- Invite families into a final performance or showcase of student work from each module. For example, students may choose to perform a fluency passage, read their End of Module task, or showcase a favorite Tableau from the core texts.

INFORMING SCHOOL BOARDS

Ensuring school board members and other school leaders understand the role of a knowledge-building curriculum designed with texts at the heart of the instruction is invaluable to the success of teachers and students. Inviting school board members to professional learning opportunities and giving them the opportunity to observe instruction are two ways Great Minds partner districts have been investing in the development of their leadership teams.

A wealth of resources is available for free on the Great Minds website. Consider sharing the following resources to ensure that all leaders understand and can articulate the value of *Wit & Wisdom* in the school district:

Wit & Wisdom’s Webinar Library: Our webinar library features several 45 to 60-minute sessions that engage educators in better understanding *Wit & Wisdom*’s instructional resources and key components. Consider sharing the whole library or select an episode that provides a compelling topic to your leadership team:

- [Resource Overview Sessions](#) provide a walkthrough of *Wit & Wisdom* instructional materials.
- [Acing the Test: Strategies for Supporting Student Achievement](#) features David Liben, senior content specialist at Student Achievement Partners, as he shares how the use of grade-level texts guide students to success on state assessments.
- [Engaging the Eye: Building Literacy via Visual Art](#) builds educators’ understanding of the role visual art plays in *Wit & Wisdom*.

Wit & Wisdom Aha! Blog: *Wit & Wisdom*’s team of teacher-writers and implementors from across the country share their insights on using the curriculum in their schools and classrooms. While there are monthly blog entries on a range of topics—consider some of these posts for your leadership team:

- [“Productive Struggle” Helping Students—and Staff](#)
- [Making the Shift to a Content-Focused Curriculum](#)
- [Speaking and Listening in *Wit & Wisdom*](#)
- [Diversity in English Language Arts Curricula](#)

In addition to the resources available on the Great Minds website, the [Melissa and Lori Love Literacy podcast](#) features leaders, education experts, and implementors across the country who share their stories of using *Wit & Wisdom*. The episodes span research, policy, implementation stories, and professional learning.

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Many community members and local organizations are enthusiastic about working with schools and students to learn more about the content in *Wit & Wisdom*’s modules. Involving the local community is a wonderful way to increase knowledge about important topics, while also being culturally responsive to students and their families. Consider some of these partnerships schools and teachers have engaged in throughout the country:

- Collaborate with local public libraries to make Volume of Reading texts—and other appropriate texts—widely available to students and their families. Some libraries also work with teachers to create field trips designed around module topics.
- Connect with local institutions, such as museums, parks, aquariums, zoos, theaters, and universities, to design field trip experiences that build on *Wit & Wisdom*’s content.
- Invite a local expert on a module topic into the classroom. For example, several teachers connect with local cardiologists for Grade 4 Module 1: A Great Heart, and the doctors always leave the conversation impressed by the questions students ask!
- Collaborate with a local artist to design pieces that reflect the knowledge students are building during a module.
- Write letters to the authors of *Wit & Wisdom* core texts and invite them to visit the class, either virtually or in-person. Many authors have done these kinds of visits!
- Find out if you have a local author or an organization that works with student writers to build on students’ writing tasks. Bringing in writing mentors can often accelerate students’ craft.

Additional Resources

Change can be challenging, but when educators engage in unfamiliar or uncomfortable content, it can be easier to resist change rather than embrace something new. Grounding conversations about texts in the respect and value of all students, families, and the community is important to the success of building foundational knowledge, teaching civil discourse, and supporting reasoning with evidence.

To continue learning more about facilitating text-based discussions in the Humanities classroom, we recommend these additional resources:

Anderson, Jill. "Bringing Controversial Books into the Classroom: How teachers can successfully navigate the tricky territory of introducing books with challenging content into the curriculum." *Usable Knowledge*. Harvard Graduate School of Education. 9 Jan. 2019, <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/19/01/bringing-controversial-books-classroom>. Accessed July 13, 2021.

Kleinrock, Liz. "How to teach kids to talk about taboo topics." TED Salon: Education Everywhere. January 2019. https://www.ted.com/talks/liz_kleinrock_how_to_teach_kids_to_talk_about_taboo_topics/transcript?rss=172BB350-0004 Accessed July 14, 2021.

"Fostering Civil Discourse: How Do We Talk About Issues that Matter?" *Facing History & Ourselves*. https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/publications/Fostering_Civil_Discourse_2020_1.pdf Accessed July 13, 2021.