

Essential Questions

(description)

Have no simple "right" answer; they are meant to be argued.

Essential Questions yield inquiry and argument—a variety of plausible (and arguable) responses, not straightforward facts that end the matter. They serve as doorways into focused yet lively inquiry and research. They should *uncover* rather than cover the subject's controversies, puzzles, and perspectives. They are intended to result in conclusions drawn by the learner, not recited facts. For example, Does art reflect culture or help shape it? Can we look but not see? Why do "seers" see what the rest of us don't? Does the artist see more clearly or look elsewhere?

Are designed to provoke and sustain student inquiry while focusing learning and final performances.

Essential Questions work best when they are designed and edited to be thought provoking to students, engaging them in sustained, focused inquiries that culminate in important performance. Such questions often involve the counterintuitive, the visceral, the whimsical, the controversial, the provocative. For example, Is the Internet dangerous for kids? Are censorship and democracy compatible? Does food that is good for you have to taste bad? Why write? Students develop and deepen their understanding of important ideas as they explore these questions.

Often address the conceptual or philosophical foundations of a discipline.

Essential Questions reflect the most historically important issues, problems, and debates in a field of study. For example, Is history inevitably biased? What is a proof? Nature or nurture? By examining such questions, students are engaged in thinking like an expert.

Raise other important questions.

Thought-provoking Essential Questions are naturally generative. They lead to other important questions within, and sometimes across, subject boundaries. For example, In nature, do only the strong survive? leads to What do we mean by "strong"? Are insects strong (since they are survivors)? What does it mean to be psychologically strong? Inquiries into human biology and the physics of physiology also follow.

Naturally and appropriately recur.

The same important questions are asked and asked again throughout one's learning and in the history of the field. For example, What makes a great book great? Are the Harry Potter novels great books? These questions can be productively examined and reexamined by 1st graders as well as college students. Over time, student responses become more sophisticated, nuanced, well-reasoned and supported as their understandings deepen.

Stimulate vital, ongoing rethinking of big ideas, assumptions, and prior lessons.

Essential questions challenge our unexamined assumptions, the inevitable simplification of our earlier learning, and the arguments we may unthinkingly take for granted. They force us to ask deep questions about the nature, origin, and extent of our understanding. For example, In light of fractions, place value, irrationals, and negative square roots—what is a number? Is it "democratic" to have an electoral college? What IS a friend? Can the enemy of my enemy be my friend? What is a story, if a story has no clear plot or moral? Is history more of a story than a science? What are the implications for studying history, if so?

Drafting Essential Questions

History and Geography



Praxis
Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3
Peer review
Exercises
Process stages
Essays

Overarching Essential Questions	Adapt these questions or generate new ones
<p>Why study history? What can we learn from the past? How am I connected to people in the past? To what extent is history different from the past?</p>	
<p>How do we know what happened in the past? What can we legitimately infer from artifacts? What should we do when primary sources disagree? Who do we believe and why? Whose "story" is it? Is history inevitably biased? Is history the story told by the "winners"? Who were the "winners" and who were the "losers" in any historical event?</p>	
<p>What causes change? What remains the same? How do patterns of cause and effect manifest themselves in the chronology of history? How has the world changed, and how might it change in the future? Is it always true that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it?</p>	
<p>Why is "where" important? Why is/was _____ located there? What makes places unique and different? What defines a region? How do a region's geography, climate, and natural resources affect the way people live and work? How does where I live influence how I live? Why do people move?</p>	
<p>What story do maps and globes tell? How and why do maps and globes change? How do maps and globes reflect history?</p>	

Historical Analysis and Interpretation

Geography

The Six Facets of Understanding

Facet 1—EXPLANATION

Sophisticated and apt explanations and theories that provide knowledgeable and justified accounts of events, actions, and ideas: Why is that so? What explains such events? What accounts for such action? How can we prove it? To what is this connected? How does this work?

Facet 2—INTERPRETATION

Narratives, translations, metaphors, images, and artistry that provide meaning: What does it mean? Why does it matter? What of it? What does it illustrate or illuminate in human experience? How does it relate to me? What makes sense?

Facet 3—APPLICATION

Ability to use knowledge effectively in new situations and diverse contexts: How and where can we use this knowledge, skill, or process? How should my thinking and action be modified to meet the demands of this particular situation?

Facet 4—PERSPECTIVE

Critical and insightful points of view: From whose point of view? From which vantage point? What is assumed or tacit that needs to be made explicit and considered? What is justified or warranted? Is there adequate evidence? Is it reasonable? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the idea? Is it plausible? What are its limits? So what? What is a novel way to look at this?

Facet 5—EMPATHY

The ability to get "inside" another person's feelings and world view: How does it seem to you? What do they see that I don't? What do I need to experience if I am to understand? What was the author, artist, or performer feeling, seeing, and trying to make me feel and see?

Facet 6—SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The wisdom to know one's ignorance and how one's patterns of thought and action inform as well as prejudice understanding: How does who I am shape my views? What are the limits of my understanding? What are my blind spots? What am I prone to misunderstand because of prejudice, habit, or style? How do I learn best? What strategies work for me?

From Topics to Big Ideas

Given the topic of your unit, brainstorm possible Big Ideas using the following categories.

Topic:

Concepts

Themes

Issues or Debates

Problems or Challenges

Processes

Theories

Paradoxes

Assumptions or Perspectives

Topic: _____
Stage 1
Stage 2
Stage 3
Stage 4
Stage 5
Stage 6
Stage 7
Stage 8
Stage 9
Stage 10
Stage 11
Stage 12
Stage 13
Stage 14
Stage 15
Stage 16
Stage 17
Stage 18
Stage 19
Stage 20
Stage 21
Stage 22
Stage 23
Stage 24
Stage 25
Stage 26
Stage 27
Stage 28
Stage 29
Stage 30
Stage 31
Stage 32
Stage 33
Stage 34
Stage 35
Stage 36
Stage 37
Stage 38
Stage 39
Stage 40
Stage 41
Stage 42
Stage 43
Stage 44
Stage 45
Stage 46
Stage 47
Stage 48
Stage 49
Stage 50
Stage 51
Stage 52
Stage 53
Stage 54
Stage 55
Stage 56
Stage 57
Stage 58
Stage 59
Stage 60
Stage 61
Stage 62
Stage 63
Stage 64
Stage 65
Stage 66
Stage 67
Stage 68
Stage 69
Stage 70
Stage 71
Stage 72
Stage 73
Stage 74
Stage 75
Stage 76
Stage 77
Stage 78
Stage 79
Stage 80
Stage 81
Stage 82
Stage 83
Stage 84
Stage 85
Stage 86
Stage 87
Stage 88
Stage 89
Stage 90
Stage 91
Stage 92
Stage 93
Stage 94
Stage 95
Stage 96
Stage 97
Stage 98
Stage 99
Stage 100