

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

What is an essential question?

Students have to think critically to answer an essential question. Instead of simply looking up answers, they conduct research and create an original answer. An essential question:

1. Provokes deep thought.
2. Solicits information.
3. Results in an original answer.
4. Helps students conduct problem-related research.
5. Makes students produce original ideas rather than predetermined answers.
6. May not have an answer.
7. Encourages critical thinking not just memorization of facts.
8. Requires no one right answer.
9. Involves thinking, not just answering.
10. Helps students make connections to past experiences.
11. Requires students to make decisions or to develop plans of action.
12. Makes connections to past experiences.
13. Asks "What is...?" questions.
14. Falls within the boundary of what is known and not known.
15. Intriguing, mysterious, and motivating.
16. Requires students to think at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.
17. Includes answers that students cannot simply look up and find (students must apply research to construct original answers).

What constitutes a good essential question?

In general, the best essential questions includes major concepts, issues, problems, concerns, interests, or themes relevant to students' lives and to their communities.

Good essential questions are open-ended, non-judgmental, meaningful and purposeful with emotive force and intellectual bite, and invite an exploration of ideas.

Good essential questions encourage collaboration amongst students, teachers, and the community and integrate technology to support the learning process.

How do we write good essential questions?

First, consider the focus of the unit or lesson activity. Ideas for a good essential question may stem from your students' particular interests in a topic.

Then, examine the theme or concept in the curriculum that must be addressed and brainstorm questions that you or the students believe would cause them to think about the concept without dictating the direction or outcome of their thinking.

Finally, utilize the six typical queries that newspaper articles address: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?

Essential Questions may be based on Bloom's highest levels of cognitive taxonomy.

BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY

Creating (highest level)

Generating new ideas, products, or ways of viewing things.

Examples: Designing, constructing, planning, producing, inventing

Evaluating

Justifying a decision or course of action.

Examples: Checking, hypothesising, critiquing, experimenting, judging

Analysing

Breaking information into parts to explore understandings and relationships.

Examples: Comparing, organising, deconstructing, interrogating, finding