

Focus Questions/Essential Questions

A focus question asks the learner to think deeply about the issue and produce original thinking about the issue.

It is an "open" question which means that it does not have clear-cut answers and is designed to make learners think.

In framing essential questions, we must first ask what our intent is. If we don't know "why we pose it, how we intend students to tackle it, and what we expect for learning activities and assessments," we don't really know what we want (Understanding by Design, Wiggins and McTighe, 110).

Questions that probe for deeper meaning and set the stage for further questioning foster the development of critical thinking skills and higher order capabilities such as; problem solving, and the understanding of complex systems.

A good essential question is the principle component of designing inquiry-based learning – the typical 'Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?' of a course of study.

Questions like these help teachers focus on the 'point' of instruction. These questions are unlike leading questions, which could help students follow key events of the plot, spot the author's use of symbolism, or clarify characterization. Over arching questions tap into larger ideas that can be accessed during a unit.

Essential questions may be framed as either "overarching questions" that are "valuable for framing courses and programs of study... around the truly big ideas" and "topical questions" that "lead to specific topical understandings within a unit" (114).

Ask yourself: What are the most important concepts my students should learn from this lesson/chapter/unit?

Essential questions are concepts in the form of questions.

Essential questions are organizers and set the focus for the lesson or unit.

Essential questions are initiators of creative and critical thinking.

Examples

Must a story have a moral? A beginning, middle, and end? Heroes and villains?

Is history a history of progress?

Are some aspects of another language and culture not understandable by people from other cultures?

Is gravity a fact or a theory? Is evolution a scientific law or a theory?

How do people express themselves through art today?

How has art changed through time?

What choices must a painter make before beginning a work?

How is sound organized to make music?

How does the structure of a musical piece create its order and clarity?

How is melody created?

Is there good harmony and bad harmony?

What does harmony add to music?

Can you have rhythm without beat?

Why does each voice and instrument have its own timbre?

Enduring Understanding	Essential Questions
Rhythm is a pattern of movement in time.	In what ways does rhythm impact how we hear/feel music?
Rhythm is the short and long sounds of music.	How does rhythm make you feel?
Music is everywhere.	Is all music beautiful?
Music is not music until humans bring it to life.	How does creating and performing music differ from listening to music?
Music is a universal language.	How does music communicate?
Music expresses human experiences and values.	In what ways have people used music to express their values and describe their experiences?
Music expands understanding of the world, its people, and one's self.	How do music and history influence each other?
History and culture influence music.	How does culture affect music? How does one musical style influence another?