

Inquiry Mini-Lessons

Choosing a Topic to Investigate

After students have generated ideas for research topics, they need to refine their thoughts and focus on one researchable topic.

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: ● pocket chart sentence strips, or chart made during the “Raising Wonderings to Fuel Inquiry” mini-lesson

Grouping: whole class, partners, or small groups

Procedure:

1. Ask students to look over the chart where you wondered aloud using prompts to guide your thinking (see the “How to Raise Wonderings to Fuel Inquiry” mini-lesson). Reread the responses chorally with students.
2. Explain to students that to turn a “wondering” into a research topic, you have to consider if you can research it to discover new information.
3. Read one wondering aloud and think aloud.
For example, if the wondering was, “What makes a good ending to a story?” you could talk about how to research that topic by interviewing people about favourite story endings, or by providing three different endings to a story and asking for opinions about which one is best and why.

I’m going to read each of these wonderings and ask myself, “Can I research this? Can I find out new information about this? How?”

Teaching Tip: Provide an example where research wouldn’t be possible, e.g., “I’m wondering what happened to the main character after the story ended?” Discuss why this isn’t a researchable topic.

4. Read another two or three wonderings aloud and think aloud about how you could research the topic.
5. Ask students to work in pairs and think about the other wonderings. Offer prompts.
6. Discuss ideas in a class sharing session. You may need to give support on the “How can we research it?” question. Consider teaching research options from the “Discuss Possible Ways to Gather Information” mini-lesson.
7. If you’re working on a whole-class inquiry, you may wish to ask students to vote on their choices for a research topic at this stage.

Think it over. Would that be an interesting topic? Is it something we’d like to know about? Can we research it? How?

Teaching Tip: If students are researching in small groups, pairs, or individually, ask them to go back to their own lists of wonderings and discuss which of them they’d like to use for their inquiry. They can present their choices to other students or to the class to obtain feedback. Model giving feedback, for example, “That’s an interesting idea. Can you research it?”