

Inquiry Mini-Lessons

Raising Deeper-Level Questions

Having students look at questions raised to determine which have easily found answers, and which require more thinking and extensive research, helps students to delve into the inquiry with deeper-level questions.

Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

- set of pre-written sentences for modelling (see Step 4)
- pocket chart, interactive whiteboard, or chart paper
- set of sentences for group discussion
- chart paper and marker

Grouping: whole class and/or small groups

Procedure:

1. Set up a pocket chart and three sentence strips with possible inquiry questions. (See step 4 for sample sentences.)

2. Tell students that you are going to show them how to look at the questions raised during an inquiry to find out which ones are simple to answer, which ones make us think more, and which ones require us to delve deeper into our research questions.

There are different ways to look at our questions to see if we can easily find an answer, if we need to do some thinking, or if we need further research to answer the question. Let's put these thoughts down on chart paper to refer to later.

3. Discuss and chart with students questions that

- have obvious answers, easily found in materials.
- require some investigation, where some digging and comparisons of information is required.
- require more extensive research, needing thinking, comparing, synthesizing, and evaluating.

4. Model by thinking aloud and using the three sentence strips in the pocket chart, or writing them on the whiteboard or chart paper. Discuss each sentence in terms of the difficulty and thinking needed in answering them. For example, if you've investigated the *Animals in Our Lives* unit, you might use the following questions:

- I wonder how you take care of a cat?

- I wonder what similarities and differences dogs and cats have as pets?

Let's look at these three questions and determine how easy it would be to find the information to answer each.

This question would require me to do a bit of research into what I would need to care for a cat. It should be easy to find.

This question would require me to check out both cats and dogs and then compare them, so more research is needed.

- I wonder how a cat would make a person's life better or more difficult?

Now for this question, I would have to do the research on caring for a cat, but I would also have to judge what problems might arise from having a pet, what advantages there would be to having a pet, and if it would make a person's life better or not. I am going to have to research and do a lot of evaluating for this one.

5. With the students, evaluate which of the questions would lead to a deeper-level inquiry. Have students rate the questions on a 1 to 3 scale, with 1 being a question easily answered and 3 being a question that would need researching and a lot of evaluating.
6. Next, provide three questions for groups of four or five students to discuss how difficult it would be to answer the question, and which question would require the researcher to probe deeper to answer it.
7. Hold a class discussion as to each group's thinking about the questions, and if they can rate them as: obvious answers; require some investigation; or, require more extensive research, and which question would make the richest inquiry.
8. If you're working on a whole-class inquiry, you may wish to ask students to review their choice of inquiry question at this point. Would they like to revise the question, or is it a question that would lead to a deeper level inquiry as is?

Which questions do you think require more thinking and evaluating? Which one do you think would be better to research? Why?

Teaching Tip: If students are researching in small groups, pairs, or individually, ask them to go back to their own inquiry questions to look at them in relation to step 5 above. Continue to provide support as needed.