

Unit Item: Essential Questions

Operating Concepts and Principles:

- To acquire KNOWLEDGE (facts) we use SKILLS (abilities) to gain UNDERSTANDING (applicability) which enables us to apply and to transfer knowledge.
- Good questions are the cause of and the means by which greater understanding happens. (Wiggins and McTighe)
- Essential Questions point to the core of big ideas and provoke deeper thinking.
- Essential Questions should be posted around your classroom.

Examples (Do's and Don'ts):

Do

- Use overarching questions (more general) like: What causes war?
- Use topical questions (more specific, unit-specific) like: How do the causes of the Civil War compare to another war you've learned about?

Don't

- Use nonessential questions to frame a unit like: What are two causes of the Civil War?

Do

- Using the fable, *Chicken Little*, ask overarching questions like: How do mobs form? Or How does an untruth gain credence?

Don't

- Using *Chicken Little* ask nonessential questions like: How do you feel when someone tells you something that you are not sure of?

Design Tips:

- Essential Questions have no simple right answer; therefore, create questions that are meant to invite inquiry or can be argued.
- Ensure that your instructional strategies and your classroom environment support and encourage an exploration of ideas.
- Essential Questions recur. Create opportunities for students to interact with the essential questions throughout the unit as well as at the end of the unit.
- Essential Questions require planning.
- Look for opportunities for the students to connect with and use prior learning.

Criteria for Success:

- Your students are excited about learning.
- Your students are able to answer a question they may never have seen before by being able to transfer their knowledge.

Additional Resources:

- The works of Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins on *Understanding by Design*