

What is an Essential Questions

Essential Questions	Not Essential Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How do the arts shape, as well as reflect, a culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What common artistic symbols were used by the Incas and the Mayans?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do effective problem solvers do when they get stuck?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What steps did you follow to get your answer?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How strong is the scientific evidence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is a variable in scientific investigations?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there ever a "just" war?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What key event sparked World War I?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can I sound more like a native speaker?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are common Spanish colloquialisms?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is a true friend?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is Maggie's best friend in the story?

Essential Questions in History and Social Studies

- Whose "story" is this?
- How can we know what *really* happened in the past?
- How should governments balance the rights of individuals with the common good?
- Should _____ (e.g., immigration, media expression) be restricted or regulated? When? Who decides?
- Why do people move?
- Why is that there? (geography)
- What is worth fighting for?

Essential Questions in Mathematics

- When and why should we estimate?
- Is there a pattern?
- How does *what* we measure influence *how* we measure? How does *how* we measure influence *what* we measure (or don't measure)?
- What do good problem solvers do, especially when they get stuck?
- How accurate (precise) does this solution need to be?
- What are the limits of this math model and of mathematical modeling in general?

Essential Questions in Language Arts

- What do good readers do, especially when they don't comprehend a text?

- • How does *what* I am reading influence *how* I should read it?
- • Why am I writing? For whom?
- • How do effective writers hook and hold their readers?
- • What is the relationship between fiction and truth?
- • How are stories from other places and times about me?

Thus an essential question is

1. Is *open-ended*; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
2. Is *thought-provoking* and *intellectually engaging*, often sparking discussion and debate.
3. Calls for *higher-order thinking*, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.
4. Points toward *important, transferable ideas* within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
5. Raises *additional questions* and sparks further inquiry.
6. Requires *support* and *justification*, not just an answer.
7. *Recur*s over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.