

What Are High Quality Text-Dependent Questions?

The Common Core State Standards have a strong and consistent close reading component requirement for the use of text-dependent questions across all grade levels. Beginning with the gathering of evidence, knowledge and insight from what is read in all genres, students must respond to text-dependent questions as a way of returning to the text to re-read, gather evidence, and research to develop and support ideas.

A text-dependent question is one that asks students to refer back to the text for more information. It doesn't require background knowledge or depend on other experiences; rather, text-dependent questions are based strictly and solely on the text in which students are reading.

Below is an example of typical questions we might typically ask students for a close reading to stimulate interest, curiosity, and discussion. Next to the questions are text-dependent versions. Questions were for a close reading of the "Gettysburg Address":

Non-text-dependent	Text-dependent
• Why did the North fight the Civil War? • Have you ever been to a civil war grave site? • Why is equality an important value? • What was the gist of <i>Jabberwocky</i>? • When was the last time you read a ballad?	• What is Lincoln referring to in the first sentence that happened over 87 years ago? • What is Lincoln saying is most important about America? • What is Lincoln saying about freedom or equality then versus now? • What is the progress of the hero in <i>Jabberwocky</i>? • What type of poem is this? • What do we expect from the structure used in this poem? • What do the stanzas mean in the last four lines?

Text dependent questions help students to better understand the intended author message by focusing exclusively on the text, rather than what they might perceive that text with or without reading it. High quality text-dependent questions go beyond what is directly stated in the text by requiring students to make inferences. Close reading of text is a crucial thread throughout all grades in the Common Core, with close attention paid to the text to answer and respond to it fully via text-dependent questions.

Quality, effective text-dependent questions will focus students on specific key words, key phrases and ideas contained only within that text. They scaffold from the simple and basic, to broader arguments and details that explore impact on other facets of the text. Text-dependent questions will “linger over” specific sentences and phrases to build on successive questions to ensure students stay focused, and read closely to comprehend as much as possible.

Scaffolding for Independence

Because the goal is always for students to read independently at grade-level, text-dependent questions reinforce focus on text in order to cultivate independence, build reading stamina, and student capacity for reading independently. • Have student spend time reading the text closely rather than engaging in extensive pre-reading activities and instruction in reading strategies. Allowing for themes to emerge for example, within the scope of the read rather than taught separately through other material, achieves these ends.

Text-dependent questions require one or more of the following tasks:

- word-by-word sentence analysis
- sentence-by-sentence paragraph analysis
- Investigation of the role key words play in changing a text’s meaning and why an author may choose one word over another
- Probing of argument and ideas in persuasive text
- Probing of key detail in literary text with multiple opportunities to build into wholes
- Examination of how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts
- Question why authors choose beginnings and conclusions
- Analyze writing patterns
- Consider the uncertain or unstated in text

Text-Dependent Questions for Close Reading

Achieve The Core and Student Achievement Partners (2013) recommends a seven-step process for creating text-dependent questions:

Step One: Identify the Core Understandings and Key Ideas of the Text

Using a “backwards design” process, teachers should start by reading and annotating the text, identifying the key insights they want students to understand from the text

Step Two: Start Small to Build Confidence

Opening questions should orient and focus students to the text. Questions should be scaffolded to allow them success to gain the confidence needed to handle more challenging questions later.

Step Three: Target Vocabulary and Text Structure

Key text structures and power words in the text that are connected to the key ideas and understandings, while crafting questions that draw students' attention to them. Academic vocabulary should be selected, or "tier two" words that are abstract and likely encountered in other reading.

Step Four: Tackle Tough Sections Head-on

Find the most challenging sections of text to craft questions around. Look for syntax, dense information, transitions, or other places where inferences can be drawn.

Step Five: Create Coherent Sequences of Text-dependent Questions

Follow a coherent sequence to ensure students stay focused on the text to arrive at a gradual understanding of its meaning.

Step Six: Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed

Analyze the standards addressed in the questions. If additional questions are needed to reach them more fully, develop them. As long as they support the standards, they will continue to align.

Step Seven: Create the Culminating Assessment

Develop a culminating activity around the key ideas or understandings identified earlier that (a) reflects mastery of one or more of the standards (b) involves writing, and (c) is structured to be completed by students independently.

<http://www.achievethecore.org/page/710/text-dependent-question-resources> 12.13.2013