

Essential Questions

Essence

- *root:* from the Latin “essentia” meaning “being.”
- *definition:* the permanent, not accidental, element of being
- *synonyms:* being, soul, substance

Merriam–Webster Online
Dictionary and Thesaurus

Synonyms for:

Knowledge

Skills

Understanding

In a nutshell:

To acquire **KNOWLEDGE** (facts) we use **SKILLS** to gain **UNDERSTANDING** (applicability) which enables us to apply and to transfer the knowledge.

When we truly understand and transfer our learning, we

- can explain;
- can interpret;
- can apply;
- have perspective;
- can empathize;
- have self-knowledge.

Wiggins and McTighe
*The Understanding by Design
Guide to Creating High-Quality Units*
2011

If transfer is the key to teaching or understanding, good questions are both the cause of and the means by which greater understanding happens.

Wiggins and McTighe
Understanding by Design
2005

The best questions serve as doorways through which learners explore the key concepts, themes, issues, and problems that reside within the content, perhaps as yet unseen: it is through the process of actively “interrogating” the content through provocative questions that deepen understanding.

Wiggins and McTighe
Understanding by Design
2005

Essential Questions:

- demand transfer beyond the topic in which we initially encounter them;
- recur throughout our lives;
- point to the core of big ideas;
- can help make sense of complicated ideas;
- can hook and hold our attention

adapted: Wiggins and McTighe
2005

Moreover, essential questions

- cause inquiry;
- provoke thought;
- cause one to consider alternatives;
- stimulate rethinking;
- spark connections with prior learning;
- invoke transferability.

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Overarching:

What lessons have we learned or not learned from US military involvement in foreign regional conflicts?

Topical:

What lessons should we learn from the Vietnam War?

Wiggins and McTighe

Understanding by Design

2005

Overarching:

What causes war?

Topical:

How do the causes of the Civil War compare to one other war you've learned about?

Nonessential (but important to the teacher)

What caused the Civil War?

Practice

Grades 4–5 Text Exemplars

Poetry:

Thayer, Ernest Lawrence, *Casey at the Bat*

Common Core Standards

*ELA and Literacy in History/ Social Studies,
Science and Technical Subjects*

Appendix B