

Overarching Essential Questions in Social Studies (examples)

History/Historical Analysis and Interpretation

- What happened in the past?
- How can we know if we weren't there?
- Why study history?
- What can we learn from the past?
- How am I connected to those in the past?
- In what ways is the past about me?
- How do we know what really happened in the past?
- Whose "story" is it?
- Whom do we believe and why?
- Is history the story told by the "winners"?
- Is history inevitably biased?
- Who were the "winners" and who were the "losers" in _____? (for any historical event)
- Was anyone at fault? (for examining any historical or literary event)
- What causes change?
- What remains the same?
- What can we legitimately infer about the artifacts we find?
- What should we do when the primary sources disagree?
- How does the legacy of earlier groups and individuals influence subsequent generations?
- How do patterns of cause/effect manifest themselves in the chronology of history?
- How has the world changed and how might it change in the future?
- Is it true that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it?

Civics/Government

- How are governments created, structured, maintained, and changed?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of government?
- How do the structures and functions of government interrelate?
- What would happen if we had no government?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of citizen's in a democracy?
- What kinds of things do "good" citizens do?
- How do personal and civic responsibilities differ?
- Can an individual make a difference?
- How do citizens (both individually and collectively) influence government policy?
- What is power?

- What forms does it take?
- How do competing interest influence how power is distributed and exercised?
- How is power gained, used, and justified?
- How can abuse of power be avoided?
- Who should govern/rule?
- Should the majority always rule?
- When should society control individuals?
- Why do we have rules and laws?
- What would happen if we didn't?
- Who should make the rules/laws?
- Is it ever o.k. to break the law?
- What are "inalienable rights"?
- How do governments balance the rights of individuals with the common good?
- Should _____ be restricted/regulated? (e.g., immigration, alcohol/drugs, media, etc.) When? Who decides?
- How do different political systems vary in their toleration and encouragement of change?

Economics

- Why do we have money?
- What is the difference between 'needs' and 'wants'?
- How does something acquire value?
- What is it worth?
- How much should it cost? Who decides?
- Who should produce goods and services?
- What impact does scarcity have on the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services?
- How does the free market system affect my life? ...our community? ...our society? ...the world?
- Who should produce goods and services?
- Should government regulate business/economy or be its partner?
- Why do people to work? Should everyone be expected to work?
- What does it mean to "make a living"?
- What is the 'best' job for you?
- How does technological change influence people's lives? ...society?
- What social, political and economic opportunities and problems arise from changes in technology?
- What goods and services should government provide? Who should pay for them? Who should benefit from them? Who should decide?
- How do different economic systems vary in their toleration and encouragement of change?

Geography

- Why is "where" important?
- Why is/was _____ located there? (e.g., capitol, factory, battle, etc.)
- What makes places unique and different?
- How does geography, climate and natural resources affect the way people live and work?
- How does where I live influence how I live?
- Why do people move?
- What do we mean by 'region'?
- What story do maps and globes tell?
- How and why do maps and globes change?
- How do maps and globes reflect history, politics, and economics?

Culture

- What does it mean to be "civilized"? What makes a civilization?
- How have civilizations evolved
- Are modern civilizations more 'civilized' than ancient ones?
- Why should we be interested in/study other cultures?
- Who are the "heroes" and what do they reveal about a culture?
- How and why do we celebrate holidays?
- Who and what do we memorialize?
- What are the significant symbols and icons of civilizations/cultures? What function(s) do they serve?
- Do the arts reflect or shape culture?
- What can we learn about a culture through its art forms?
- What happens when cultures collide?
- Why do people fight? Is conflict inevitable? ...desirable?
- What is worth fighting for? Is there such a thing as a "just" war?
- What is a revolution?
- What causes people to 'revolt'?
- Are revolutions inevitable?
- How are all religions the same?
- How does belief influence action?
- How and why do beliefs change?

Essential Questions from the NATIONAL COUNCIL of SOCIAL STUDIES

CULTURE

- What is civic participation and how can I be involved?
- How has the meaning of citizenship evolved?
- What is the balance between rights and responsibilities?
- What is the role of the citizen in the community and the nation, and as a member of the world community?
- How can I make a positive difference?

TIME, CONTINUITY, CHANGE

- Who am I?
- What happened in the past?
- How am I connected to those in the past?
- How has the world changed and how might it change in the future?
- Why does our personal sense of relatedness to the past change?
- How can the perspective we have about our own life experiences be viewed as part of the larger human story across time?
- How do our personal stories reflect varying points of view and inform contemporary ideas and actions?

PEOPLE, PLACES, ENVIRONMENT

- Where are things located?
- Why are they located where they are?
- What patterns are reflected in the groupings of things?
- What do we mean by region?
- How do landforms change?
- What implications do these changes have for people?

POWER, AUTHORITY, GOVERNANCE

- What is power?
- What forms does it take?
- Who holds it?
- How is it gained, used, and justified?
- What is legitimate authority?
- How are governments created, structured, maintained, and changed?
- How can we keep government responsive to its citizens' needs and interests?
- How can individual rights be protected within the context of majority rule?

PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, CONSUMPTION

- What is to be produced?
- How is production to be organized?
- How are goods and services to be distributed?

- What is the most effective allocation of the factors of production (land, labor, capital, and management)?

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, SOCIETY

- Is new technology always better than that which it will replace?
- What can we learn from the past about how new technologies result in broader social change, some of which is unanticipated?
- How can we cope with the ever-increasing pace of change, perhaps even with the feeling that technology has gotten out of control?
- How can we manage technology so that the greatest number of people benefit from it?
- How can we preserve our fundamental values and beliefs in a world that is rapidly becoming one technology-linked village?

CIVIC IDEALS and PRACTICES

- What is civic participation and how can I be involved?
- How has the meaning of citizenship evolved?
- What is the balance between rights and responsibilities?
- What is the role of the citizen in the community and the nation, and as a member of the world community?

+++++

Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions in Language Arts and Literature
(examples)

Literature

Great stories/books address universal themes of human existence and conflict.

Great stories raise questions (and sometimes provide answers).

- What makes a great book/story great?
- Is a "good read" always a great book?
- What is the relationship between popularity and greatness in literature?
- Why read fiction?
- Can fiction reveal truth? Can novels reveal truths about human nature?
- What is the relationship between "fiction" and "truth?"
- Can a fictional story be "true"?
- Is "historical fiction" a contradiction?
- How are stories from other places and times about me?
- What can fairy tales from around the world teach us?

- What's new and what's old?
- Have we run across this idea before?
- So what? Why does it matter? What does it mean?

Fiction can entertain while revealing truths.

- What is a story?
- Can fiction reveal truth?
- What can we learn from fiction?
- What is the relationship between "fiction" and "truth?"
- Can a fictional story be "true"?
- Is "historical fiction" a contradiction?
- Should a story teach you something?
- Must a story have a moral?; heroes and villains?

Literature can reflect, clarify and criticize the times it portrays.

- Does literature reflect culture or shape it?

Reading

- Why read?
- What can we learn from print?
- How do reading and listening differ?
- What would happen if people couldn't read?
- What do good readers sound like?
- Can a machine (e.g., scanner, robot) learn to read?

+++++

Essential Questions

What are the most important concepts my students should learn from this lesson/chapter/unit?

1. Essential questions are concept in the form of questions. Questions suggest inquiry.
2. Essential questions are organizers and set the focus for the lesson or unit.
3. Essential questions are initiators of creative and critical thinking.
4. Essential questions are conceptual commitments focusing on key concepts implicit in the curriculum.

Criteria for Essential Questions

- Each student should be able to understand the essential question(s).
- The language of the questions should be in broad terms.
- There should be a logical sequence to a set of essential questions.

- o Essential questions should be posted in the classroom.

Writing Essential Questions

- What is your teaching objective?
Write the objective as a question.
- Do you need smaller key questions?
 - Rewrite if necessary to make sure learners understand the question(s).

Criteria for "Essential Questions"

Essential questions

a. go to the heart of a discipline. They can be found in the most historically important (and controversial) problems and topics in the sciences: What is adequate "proof" in each field of inquiry? Is our society more advanced than those of the past?

b. have no one obvious "right" answer: essential "answers" are not self-evidently true. Even if there are "truths" and essential theories in a discipline, the student comes to know that there are other plausible theses and hypotheses to be considered and sorted through along with the "sanctioned" views.

c. are higher-order, in Bloom's sense: they are always matters of analysis, synthesis, and evaluative judgment. The student is always asked to "go beyond" the information given.

d. recur throughout one's learning. The same important questions get asked and re-asked, if they are essential. Our answers to essential questions may never be adequate, but they should become increasingly sophisticated.

e. are framed to provoke and sustain student interest. Essential questions work best when the questions are edited to be thought-provoking to students, likely to generate interesting inquiries, and able to accommodate diverse interests and learning styles.

f. link to other essential questions. Good questions engender other good questions. It is therefore useful to think of a family of related questions as anchoring a course and a unit, and also to make clear to students that their questions that arise naturally are part of clarifying the essential questions.

Examples of essential questions:

- Must a story have a moral? A beginning, middle, and end? Heroes and villains?
- Did Gorbachev undermine or fulfill the promises of the Revolution?
- Is history a history of progress?
- What makes a family a community?
- Do statistics always lie?
- Are some aspects of another language and culture not understandable by people from other cultures?

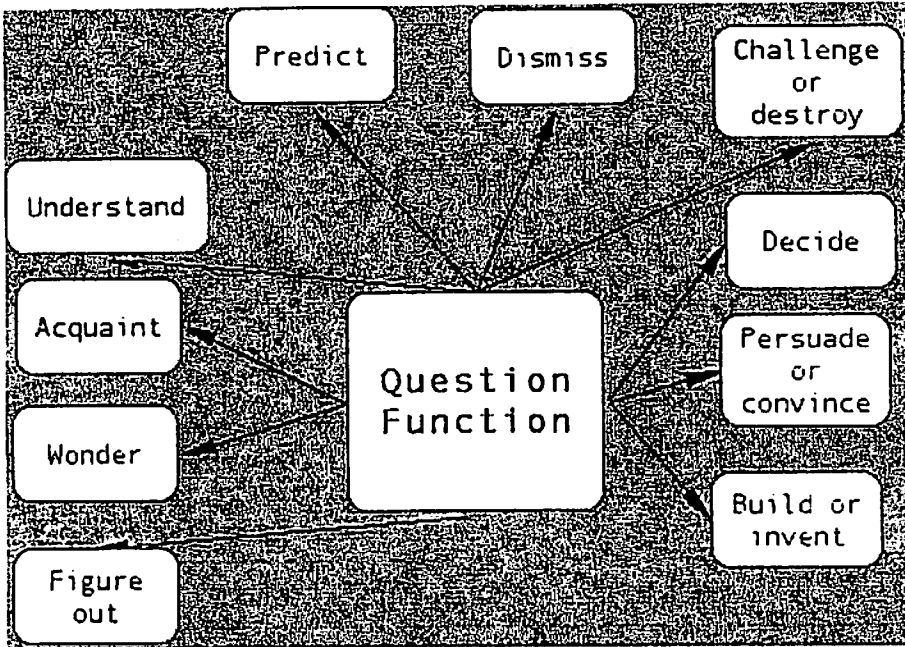
What Is Inquiry?

Inquiry is a systematic investigation or study into a worthy question, issue, problem or idea. It is the type of work that those working in living disciplines actually undertake to create or build knowledge. Therefore, inquiry involves serious engagement and investigation and the active creation and testing of new knowledge.

Schools ought to be communities of robust inquiry that strive to foster intellectual habits of thought, meaning-making and discourse in all students, rich and poor, gifted and severely ordinary. Schools ought to be communities where students come to do rich, engaging work--work that inspires, develops insight and stirs the imagination.

Schools ought to be places of robust inquiry that:

- engage students in meaningful, purposeful, worthy work. Work that is authentic, intellectually and emotionally engaging
- respect and cultivate the dispositions that all children bring with them when they first walk through our doors: imagination, curiosity, persistence, and the drive to understand the world.
- respect and cultivate the ability of all children to think-with their words, their drawings, their bodies, their heads and their hearts.
- help students engage with, and understand, difficult matters.
- help students uncover things that have been hidden, and bring to life brand new questions, ideas and abilities.
- make school an intellectually exciting place to be, a place where learning is fun even when it is hard, perhaps especially when it is hard, and frustrating, and challenging.
- require teachers to be co-inquirers with the students in the inquiry.
- require teachers to co-create meaningful, authentic learning tasks and activities with students that lead to deep understanding.



<http://questioning.org/questionpress.html>