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Sincerely,
Karen Haag

Learning to Ask OUR Questions in Adult-Led Groups

Some groups may need you (or your assistant if you are lucky to have one) acting as the leader in each group for quite a long time. While working with the discussion groups, you might model the language students use to ask questions. Gradually scaffold that responsibility to the individuals. Sometimes the adult(s) have to go from group to group. Bring a clipboard and a score sheet or note paper with you. In your closure time compliment 1-3 things that worked and 1-2 goals the students need to improve.



Start Small

You might want your class to discuss something easier before students try talking about books. Let them independently brainstorm suggestions for improving recess, for instance. Form small groups and practice the same discussion-group format they will use for discussing books eventually: the group leader welcomes each person, states the purpose for the day's discussion, leads the discussion, summarizes the discussion, and shares the group's best suggestion. I even had lots of luck with struggling high school students by starting with a topic that was not academic.

Question Research

If everything is going well, groups can research the kinds of questions that produce the best discussion in a book club. As a summary, students notice and then discuss why one particular question produced such great conversation. With the whole class, one small group might share their best question and the reasons why it worked. As their teacher, tease out about what makes a discussion-question a good discussion question.

Get Help; Give Help (More information, page 4.)

When I first taught asking questions, I thought students could only ask questions about confusing parts and vocabulary. One day I realized that they could also read as authors, too! I could teach them to ask questions as if they were writers. The questions they brought would be in the form of theories: Do you think the mother was coughing because the author was foreshadowing her illness?

So, now when students say, I don't have a question, I point out that questions don't only have to be about plot, but can also be about inferences. The "[If You're Stuck, Ask These Questions](#)" lists those kinds of questions as a reminder: literary elements as well as main idea, theme, author's purpose, and their personal interpretations. (Poster on Question Page.)

Give Feedback to Students on Their Participation

Use [Star Charts](#) to evaluate group and individual behaviors. Join each group for about 5 minutes. Map the conversation. Check to see who is asking questions. Write down the questions asked. (See Star Chart page)

When your groups have mastered participating equally, move on to deepening the discussion by using the [Response Checklists](#). This way of recording points for contributing helps students think beyond just asking a question, any question. Give points for deepening the conversation by asking follow-up questions, sustaining conversation, encouraging one another, and referring to the text. Put Star Charts and/or Response Sheets under the DocCam without names. Discuss what the maps reveal about groups. As a class, set goals for the next time. (See Response Checklist Page)

Personal Goals (See Formative Assessment Page)

Setting goals is important. Students should set personal goals in their daybooks before they enter a discussion group. If you have modeled group goal setting, you can bridge to personal goal setting easily. Personal goals range from the shy child - *I will ask one question today* - to the exuberant child - *I will ask someone to share before I do*. Ask children to set goals before they go into groups and then write an evaluation after the discussion, also. Behaviors will improve if you collect their written thoughts and respond to them.

Further research may involve gathering questions. (Download lesson on Question Page.)

Sort sticky notes into question categories. Take a look again at the [5-Day Introduction to Questions lesson plan](#). Find the types of questions I modeled when reading *The Three Questions*.

You and your class could sort questions students ask into categories of your own. Or, you might introduce your students to the question types listed below from authors Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann writing in *Mosaic of Thought*. I've known teachers who introduced Bloom's question taxonomy and other published question types as well. Children need examples of what kinds of questions people ask about books. This concept may be new, even among your avid readers, so model, model, model!

Don't forget mixed-ability reading groups.

Let students who are reading below grade level participate in the discussion with their higher-functioning, reading peers. Some students struggle with reading but not with talking! In this way, they contribute their questions and theories also. Just read one book onto tape or onto your computer. Listening to audiobooks is an excellent way to "get through the text" and so students can participate with their buddies. In this way, strugglers have the fun of discussing and see the benefits of reading. I've seen this spark some to try reading on their own.

Finally, another idea is to introduce Socratic Seminars (on Socratic Seminar page).

Conducting these discussion groups strengthens small groups. You are in the group facilitating the discussion and commenting on behaviors. In other words, you are demonstrating how to talk with one another even though you're in a whole group for this activity. In addition, participating involves personal goal setting and reflection practice like students will be doing in their small groups as well.

Question types from Keene and Zimmermann (Poster, page 5)

- ✓ With answers in text
- ✓ With answers I must find by thinking about the book and my own personal experience
- ✓ With no certain answers
- ✓ To clarify meaning
- ✓ About what's coming next in the book
- ✓ About the author's intent
- ✓ About the author's style
- ✓ About the author's format

After you figure out your categories, challenge students to read a text and think of a question for each category. It's contrived, but students broaden their ability to ask different kinds of questions. And, we only do that one time just to make them aware.


Question Study (Download on Question Page)

Students might study how others categorize questions. They might study standardized test questions. Download [Question Study](#) for more information.

Sometimes readers insist they don't have any questions. They might be telling the truth! They might understand the plot, characters, and setting as a result of the lessons I've taught and their own personal experience. Once, students understand how to ask literal questions, they need to learn to ask inferential questions. So, I started teaching that there are 2 types of questions you can bring to reading circles.

There are clarifying questions about words and plot with which they need help. But, there are also author's purpose questions. For example, "I noticed that the mother coughed on page 27. Do you think that the author is hinting that the mother is actually going to die?" (This is actually a question about foreshadowing. If I'm in the group, I can teach students what technique they're questioning. Even if they're working in groups independently, they can ask questions about how the author is leading them – without knowing the name for the technique.)

As you can see below, I've divided these questions into "Getting Help" and "Giving Help". I encourage readers to ask for help where they need it. Then, I tell them to push the thinking of the group deeper by discussing author's purpose, literary elements, and personal connections. Once students think about this idea, it is easier to think of questions to bring. The handout below helps them remember. My advice to the groups: Get literal questions answered first. But then, go deeper. Discuss the greater meanings and the book's impact on you.

Cut 

Handout to glue in reader's notebook.

Bring **questions and observations** to your group!

GET HELP

Words I can't pronounce or don't know.
Anything I don't understand.

GIVE HELP

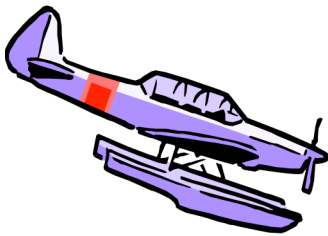
What clues did I notice?
What do I think will happen?
What is the message, the theme?
Why did the author write this book?
How is the book affecting me?
How will this book make me think or act differently?
What does this book make me think about?
Do I like the book?



The first time I introduce Keene and Zimmermann's question types, I ask readers to ask one question of each type. The exercise helps readers see different kinds of questions they might ask, but it is not something I require more than that one time.

Types of Questions Readers Ask Before, During and After Reading

Examples drawn from the question types outlined in *Mosaic of Thought* by Keene and Zimmerman and content in *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen



Questions that can be answered by referencing the text.

Example: Where did the plane land? (The base of the L of the lake - page 39.)

Questions that can be answered by personal experience.

Example: Can any one explain to me the kind of problem the mosquitoes in this chapter caused?

Questions to clarify meaning.

Example: What kinds of injuries does Brian have?

Questions about what's coming next.

Example: Will the moose attack again?

Questions about unfamiliar words.

What is a Cessna?

Questions about author's purpose or style or format.

Example: Why does Gary Paulsen repeat phrases over and over?

Questions that can't be answered. *Example: "If you keep walking backwards from good luck, you'll have bad luck." (Page 40) Do you agree?*