Writing Argumentative Questions to Focus our History Research

How?
- On its own this is a straightforward invitation to present an account of a given situation or development.
- Add a second part (a qualifying term) to set up a defensible argument and encourage an analysis.
  - EX: How and why did Indo-China achieve independence from France after the Second World War?
- Adding a second word such as “successfully,” “effective,” “accurate,” or “far,” turns a “how” question into the one that requires a judgment. The writer is now expected to provide his/her detailed reasons for that judgment. Note the placement of the qualifier
  - EX: How successful has the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) been in achieving its aims?

To what extent?
- Asks the writer to evaluate the success, importance or otherwise of one argument or concept over another. For example:
  - EX: To what extent can nationalism rather than religion be considered the cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict?

Why?
- A key word that invites the writer to present reasons for the existence of something. The brevity of this command rather disguises a powerful requirement to present a detailed, reasoned argument. In effect it is similar to “account for” which asks the writer to explain a particular event or outcome.
  - EX: Why have African-Americans been attracted to the teachings of Islam?
  - EX: Why, since independence, have Asian countries achieved greater economic success than those in Africa?

Note: Questions that can be easily answered with a yes or no will not be accepted. These types of question ask for narratives, or reports….we are trying to help you become historians that read, think and then analyze events in history. How do you do this? It starts with a finely tuned, narrowly focused question about a very specific aspect of history.
Pre-IB Middle East Research Question Exercise: Writing Purposeful Questions

**Step 1. Name your sub-topic.** Early in your research, describe your work in one sentence.

I am learning about (or reading about, or studying) __________________________________________.

- **Ex:** I am studying *the impact of imperialism on the Congo.*

**Step 2.** When have learned about some specific topics related to your assigned country, develop 2 questions to narrow the focus of the next phase of your research. You will eventually use one of these to write a “Plan of Investigation” (Part A of your project)

- **Ex:** I want to study public funding for the arts *because* I want to find out how accessible the arts are to those people who are members of the working poor.

Eventually, this might become:

- **Research Question:** How accessible are the arts to people *who belong to the class of the working poor?* Or, to what extent are the arts accessible to *lower socio-economic groups in the U.S.?*

First Draft of Possible Research Questions:

1. I want to study __________________________________________ because (in order to) I want to find out (who, what when, where, whether, why or how)________________________________________________________

Turn that into a research question:

Research Q:

________________________________________________________

2. I want to study_________________________________________ because (in order to) I want to find out (who, what when, where, whether, why, or how)________________________________________________________

Turn that into a research question:

Research Q:

________________________________________________________

**Now:** Make a Plan for your Investigation (this is Part A). What types of sources should you look for to find answers to your question? Don't say you will find ‘primary source information because it is accurate and not biased and secondary source information because historians have written it.’ Why would *these specific sources* help you answer *your specific question?* Think about what kinds of information you need in order to answer specific parts of your question.....

List source ideas below: