

# **A Guide to Creating Text Dependent Questions for Close Analytic Reading**

## **Text Dependent Questions: What Are They?**

Typical text dependent questions ask students to perform one or more of the following tasks:

- Analyze paragraphs on a sentence by sentence basis and sentences on a word by word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words
- Investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another
- Probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole
- Examine how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts
- Question why authors choose to begin and end when they do
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated

## **Creating Text-Dependent Questions for Close Analytic Reading of Texts**

An effective set of text dependent questions delves systematically into a text to guide students in extracting the key meanings or ideas found there. They typically begin by exploring specific words, details, and arguments and then moves on to examine the impact of those specifics on the text as a whole. Along the way they target academic vocabulary and specific sentence structures as critical focus points for gaining comprehension.

While there is no set process for generating a complete and coherent body of text dependent questions for a text, the following process is a good guide that can serve to generate a core series of questions for close reading (of any given text).

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

As in any good reverse engineering or "backwards design" process, teachers should start by identifying the key insights they want students to understand from the text—keeping one eye on the major points being made is crucial for fashioning an overarching set of successful questions and critical for creating an appropriate culminating assignment.

### **Step Two: Start Small to Build Confidence**

The opening questions should be ones that help orientate students to the text and be sufficiently specific enough for them to answer so that they gain confidence to tackle more difficult questions later on.

### **Step Three: Target Vocabulary and Text Structure**

Locate key text structures and the most powerful academic words in the text that are connected to the key ideas and understandings, and craft questions that illuminate these connections.

### **Step Four: Tackle Tough Sections Head-on**

Find the sections of the text that will present the greatest difficulty and craft questions that support students in mastering these sections (these could be sections with difficult syntax, particularly dense information, and tricky transitions or places that offer a variety of possible inferences).

### Step Five: Create Coherent Sequences of Text Dependent Questions

The sequence of questions should not be random but should build toward more coherent understanding and analysis to ensure that students learn to stay focused on the text to bring them to a gradual understanding of its meaning.

### Step Six: Identify the Standards That Are Being Addressed

Take stock of what standards are being addressed in the series of questions and decide if any other standards are suited to being a focus for this text (forming additional questions that exercise those standards).

### Step Seven: Create the Culminating Assessment

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

From <http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools/text-dependent-questions>

## Types of Text-Dependent Questions

- **General understanding**-This type of question asks students to look for the gist of the text they have read.
- **Key details**-Asking students *who, what, where, when, why, or how*, including nuanced details. These questions should focus on important information in the text, not trivia.
- **Vocabulary**-- Focusing on word definitions, using context or structure to figure out unfamiliar words, ideas or feelings evoked by key words, shades of meaning, word choice, figurative language, idioms, and confusing words or phrases.
- **Text structure**-Asking students to think about how the text is organized-for example, the use of character dialogue to propel action or the problem-and-solution structure.
- **Author's purpose**-Asking whether the text intends to inform, entertain, persuade, or explain something, and whether the author has a particular bias and leaves out certain information.
- **Inferences**-Asking students how the parts of a text build to the overall point or effect. "This means that they must probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, or each key detail in literary text," say Fisher and Frey. "Importantly, inference questions require students to read the entire selection so that they know where the text is going and how they can reconsider key points in the text as contributing elements of the whole."
- **Opinions, arguments, inter-textual connections**-These questions should come after students have read and reread the text and developed their understanding through other types of questions.

"Text-Dependent Questions" by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey in *Principal Leadership*, September 2012 (Vol. 13, #1, p. 70-73), [www.nassp.org/pl0912fisher](http://www.nassp.org/pl0912fisher); the authors can be reached at [dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu) and [nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu).