

The questions in the left column below are a mix of Essential, Unit, and Content Questions. Determine which questions are Essential, Unit, and Content. Place a checkmark in the column that best identifies each question: "EQ" for Essential, "UQ" for Unit, or "CQ" for Content. Discuss your answers with your small group.

Mixed Questions – Unit 1	EQ	UQ	CQ
Where did early explorers go?			
How did early explorers change the world?			
Who are some of the early explorers?			
What does it take to change the world?			
What impact did explorers have on their home country?			

Mixed Questions – Unit 2	EQ	UQ	CQ
How do the endings of Cinderella differ across cultures?			
Are we really so different from our neighbors?			
What are common themes amongst fairy tales?			
What can we learn about ourselves and other people by reading fairy tales?			
How do fairy tales reflect one's culture?			
What is the basic plot of almost all Cinderella stories?			
What are the definitions of plot, conflict, climax, and resolution?			

Notes:

In order to develop an Essential Question, it is often helpful to identify the “Big Idea”—or the Overarching Concept—that you will be teaching. This concept should serve as the focus of the unit, including curriculum, instruction, and assessment. These ideas provide the framework where students will connect specific knowledge and skills in order to see the purpose and relevance of the topic they are studying. Often, these concepts are found in your content standards. Listed below are some “big idea” concepts.

Acceptance	Diversity	Honor	Power
Adaptation	Energy	Identity	Progress
Balance	Equality	Individuality	Proportion
Beauty	Ethics	Integrity	Responsibility
Change	Excellence	Journey	Rights
Chaos	Exploration	Law	Risk
Choice	Family	Leadership	Rule
Communication	Force	Liberty	Scale
Community	Form	Matter	Systems
Conflict	Freedom	Migration	Time
Connection	Friendship	Motivation	Truth
Cooperation	Future	Need	Universe
Courage	Geography	Patterns	Value
Cycles	Happiness	Perspective	Virtue
Dignity	Harmony	Pollution	Wealth

Revising Essential Questions Using “Big Ideas”

With a partner, pick one or more of the Essential Questions on the next two pages. Brainstorm some “big ideas” that could relate to each Essential Question. The questions in the left column should be considered “first draft” and still needing improvement. After identifying one or more big ideas for the question(s) you want to improve, work together to revise at least one of the Essential Questions based on one or more of the big ideas. You may want to refer to the information on page 3.08.

Original Essential Question	Big Idea	Revised Essential Question
Why are the stages of a frog's life important?		
How do forensic scientists use the scientific procedures to solve a crime?		
Why is it important to gather accurate facts when compiling information?		
How and why did people explore the world?		
Why is my animal important to the rainforest and the world?		

Original Essential Question	Big Idea	Revised Essential Question
What are the physical characteristics of a country and how do they affect humans?		
How is my health affected by my actions?		
How can strangers tell <i>my</i> story?		

Notes:

Step 3: Writing Essential and Unit Questions

Divide into small groups and think about the Content Questions listed below and how these questions could be used in a unit of study. Think about some of the larger concepts to which the Content Questions relate.

Create Essential and Unit Questions that will motivate students and target higher-order thinking. Remember that both of these types of questions should be open-ended questions. The Unit Question is tied more directly to the specific unit; whereas, the Essential Question often can encompass a number of units. Remember to write questions in student-appropriate language.



Note: You may want to review the sample Curriculum-Framing Questions starting on Appendix C.01.

Content Questions	Unit Questions	Essential Question
Example: Who are some community helpers? What do they do? <i>(Primary Level)</i>	Which of our community helpers is the most important? Which community helper would you most like to be?	Why do we need others?
What lives in a rainforest? Where are the rainforests? <i>(Elementary)</i>		
What are some important inventions of the last 100 years? <i>(Upper Elementary - Lower High School)</i>		
What are the qualities of a Greek hero? Who are some famous heroes of the 20th century? <i>(Middle School)</i>		

Content Questions	Unit Questions	Essential Question
What is debt? What is a national deficit? How much is a billion? How much is a trillion? <i>(Middle School)</i>		
What is impressionism? Who were some Impressionist painters? <i>(Middle - High School)</i>		
What are some communicable diseases? How do antibiotics work? How do doctors and scientists identify and treat new strains of viruses? <i>(High School)</i>		
Your own (optional):		

What thinking skills could be employed from your "Habits of Learning Taxonomy" (pages 1.18-1.19) to answer the question(s) you created above?

Activity 5

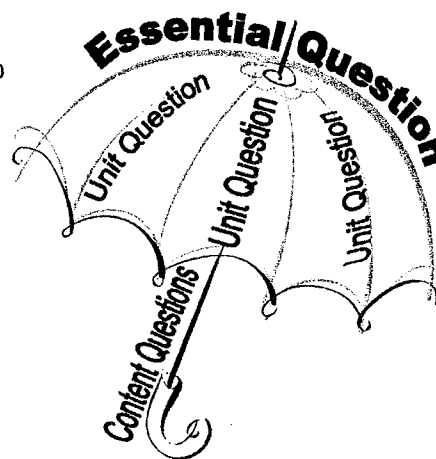
Writing Your Own Curriculum-Framing Questions

Step 1: Creating a First Draft of Questions

Writing Curriculum-Framing Questions often takes time and practice to develop. They are sometimes difficult to create and usually require many revisions. Some teachers find it easier to start with the big idea, draft an Essential Question, and then work on the Unit and Content Questions. Other teachers find it easier to look at the specific unit(s) they teach and then see how they fit into a bigger idea and Essential Question.

No matter which method or process you choose, below are some tips for writing an Essential Question:

- Think about why you are studying this material. Why do we care about this? What is the value of studying this?
- What is the big concept you are trying to uncover? What is the long-term understanding that you want students to gain?
- Do your standards have any "big concept" words that you could work from and build upon?
- Do not worry about the mechanics and language. Focus on brainstorming.
- Stay away from questions asking for definitions or an understanding of a "simple" process.
- Ask yourself if the question has basically only one, or one narrow group, of correct answers—if it does, it is not an Essential or Unit Question.
- You may want to write the questions in adult language to capture the essential understandings, and then rewrite in "student" language.



In this image, the Essential Question is the broad, overarching question that encompasses all of the Unit Questions. The Unit Questions help to define the shape and scope of the larger Essential Question. The Content Questions provide a "good handle" to understand and support the Essential and Unit Questions.

A Process for Writing Your Own Questions

1. View the sample Essential and Unit Questions in Appendix C for ideas.
2. Choose the process of creating Essential or Unit Questions that best suits you and draft a first set. Use the questions in one of the columns below to develop answers for the Curriculum-Framing Questions table on the next page.



Note: If you prefer to type your answers, open the *Writing Your Own Questions* document at: www.inteleducation.com/teachingthinking/ptfiles

Moving from Big Ideas to Content-Specific Ideas	Moving from Content-Specific Ideas to Big Ideas
<p>a. Keeping your standards in mind, what are the “big ideas” in your curriculum? (Refer to page 3.11.) See if any key terms jump out at you as important concepts for your classroom.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>b. From those big idea(s), brainstorm a sentence that would go to the heart of your curriculum. What is the enduring learning that you would want your students to remember from what they learned in your class? Brainstorm some statements that would cover several units or even your whole curriculum.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>c. Considering your overarching concepts or big ideas, brainstorm an Essential Question that you would like your students to ponder and consider as they move through several units that develop understanding of different facets of this concept.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>d. Considering the standards for your unit, what Unit Question(s) go to the heart of what you want your students to learn in this specific unit? Be sure that the question(s) are large enough to cover most of the topics in your unit. You may have more than one Unit Question.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>a. From your standards, develop a couple of Content Questions for this lesson.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>b. Considering your Content Questions and standards, what Unit Question(s) go to the heart of what you want them to learn in this specific unit? Be sure that the question(s) are large enough to cover most of the topics in your unit. You may have more than one Unit Question.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>c. Looking at your Unit Question(s) and Content Questions, brainstorm the “big ideas” that your unit focuses on the most. (Refer to page 3.11.) See if any key terms jump out at you as important concepts for your classroom.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>d. From those big idea(s), brainstorm a sentence that would go to the heart of your curriculum. What is the enduring learning that you would want your students to remember from what they learned in your class? Brainstorm some statements that would cover several units or even your whole curriculum.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

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Moving from Big Ideas to Content-Specific Ideas

- e. Check your Essential and Unit Questions. Do they have the same key word or concept? If so, it is likely that your Essential Question isn't "big" enough. Revise if necessary.

- f. From your standards, develop a couple of Content Questions for this lesson. What will your students need to know or be able to do in order to fully answer and understand the Essential and Unit Questions?

- g. Check to be sure your sentences are in "student-appropriate" language. Use the table below to revise, revise, revise.

Moving from Content-Specific Ideas to Big Ideas

- e. Considering your overarching concepts or big ideas, brainstorm an Essential Question that you would like your students to ponder and consider as they move through several units that develop understanding of different facets of this concept.

- f. Check your Essential and Unit Questions. Do they have the same key word or concept? If so, it is likely that your Essential Question isn't "big" enough. Revise if necessary.

- g. Review your Content Questions. Will your students need to know other facts and procedures in order to be able to fully answer the Essential and Unit Questions? Add Content Questions, if necessary.

- h. Check to be sure your sentences are in "student-appropriate" language. Use the table below to revise, revise, revise.

First Draft of Curriculum-Framing Questions

Essential Question	
Unit Question(s)	
Content Questions	