

What is an Essential Question?

Essential questions fall under three categories:

1. Important questions that recur throughout one's life – these questions are broad in scope and timeless in nature. They are arguable (students will likely change their minds about the answers several times throughout the unit) and require abstract and critical thinking skills. These questions spark meaningful connections with prior learning and personal experiences.
2. Key inquiries within a discipline – these are questions that are alive or currently debated in a particular field. They compel novices and experts alike to explore and study the issue.
3. Questions that help students make sense of complicated ideas and knowledge – these questions promote genuine and relevant inquiry into the big ideas and core content, provoke deep thought and lively discussion, and require students to consider alternatives, weigh evidence, support an argument and justify their answers.

Examples of Essential Questions

- ◆ Have technological advances been positive or negative for society?
- ◆ How does an animal's body and behavior enable it to survive in harsh or changing habitats?
- ◆ How does the climate and natural resources of a region influence how people live and work?
- ◆ What is healthy eating?
- ◆ Why do we need money?
- ◆ In what ways does art reflect and shape culture?
- ◆ What are the needs of a community?
- ◆ How does perspective influence our understanding of a story?
- ◆ Where can magnetic forces be found in nature?
- ◆ Can fiction reveal truth?
- ◆ Can the value of art be measured objectively?
- ◆ Is there a difference between a cultural generalization and a stereotype?