

# ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

## Definition

Open-ended questions designed to promote sustained inquiry and meaning making. Essential questions differ in scope and breadth. We distinguish between overarching and topical questions. **Overarching** essential questions point beyond the particulars of a unit to the larger, transferable ideas and enduring understandings. They recur fruitfully across the grades, spiraling throughout the curriculum to provide conceptual through lines. Effective overarching essential questions:

- Are broad and general in nature
- Lead to overarching understandings

**Topical** essential questions are more specific. They guide the exploration of ideas and processes within particular topics within a unit of study.

## Purpose

Essential questions are identified in Stage 1 for the purpose of:

1. Provoking deep thought, lively discussion, sustained inquiry, and additional questions leading to new and/or deeper insight(s)
2. Asking students to consider alternatives, weigh evidence, support their ideas and rethink key ideas
3. Support connections within and across content and context

## Examples

<b>Overarching Essential Questions</b>	<b>Topical Essential Questions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>In what ways does art reflect culture as well as shape it?</i></li><li>• <i>How do artists choose tools, techniques, and materials to express their ideas?</i></li> <li>• <i>What makes a great story?</i></li><li>• <i>How do effective writers hook and hold their readers?</i></li></ul>	<p><b>unit on masks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>What do masks and their use reveal about the culture? What tools, techniques, and materials are used in creating masks from different cultures?</i></li></ul> <p><b>unit on mysteries</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>What is unique about the mystery genre?</i></li><li>• <i>How do great mystery writers hook and hold their readers?</i></li></ul>

# UNDERSTANDINGS

## Definition

Identify the important, transferrable ideas and processes that students should come to understand. Understandings differ in scope and breadth. *Overarching* understandings point beyond the specifics of a unit to the larger, transferrable ideas that spiral throughout the curriculum. *Topical* understandings target the particular insights we want students to attain within a unit of study. Topical understandings are less likely to transfer to other topics. Effective understandings...

- Reflect important, transferrable ideas
- Are stated as full-sentence generalizations in response to the prompt:

*Students will understand that...*

## Purpose

Desired understandings are identified in Satge 1 for the purpose of:

1. focusing curriculum around enduring, transferable learning to avoid educator and student fixation on narrow objectives;
2. encouraging active meaning making by students;

## Examples

Overarching Understandings	Topical Understandings
<u>Economics</u> Price is a function of supply and demand.	<u>Unit on Money</u> (elementary) The cost of a Beanie Baby depends on demand and availability at any given time.
<u>Science</u> Gravity is not a physical thing but a term describing the constant rate of acceleration of all falling objects.	<u>Unit on Gravitational Force</u> Vertical height, not the angle and distance of descent, determines the eventual speed of a falling object.
<u>Physical Education</u> A muscle that contracts through its full range of motion will generate more force	<u>Unit on Golf</u> A full stroke with follow-through will increase your distance on a drive.
<u>Mathematics</u> Mathematics allows us to see patterns that might have remained unseen.	<u>Unit on Statistics</u> Statistical analysis and graphic displays often reveal patterns in seeming random data or populations, enabling predictions.