

Compelling Questions

Swan, Lee, Grant (2018)

Traits of a Compelling Question

- Matches and awakens your interests and concerns
- Explores a mystery
- Is age appropriate
- Is intriguing
- Requires more than a “yes” or “no” answer
- Is engaging
- Requires more than mere fact gathering
- Is baffling
- Has no “right answer”
- Provokes curiosity
- Requires synthesis
- Is conceptually rich
- Has “staying power”
- Explores controversial issue

Type of Compelling Questions	Definition	Examples
Broad-Brush	Appraise big issues often through a case study	Is everyone unique? What is justice? What is truth?
Case-Study	Look deeply into ideas, actions, or ideas	Should Puerto Rico be a state?
Personalized	Offer opportunities to connect with the real world	Am I going to vote? Why do I have to be responsible?
Analytic	Examine the component dimensions of an idea, event, or phenomenon	Why did the Pilgrim-Wampanoag friendship go so wrong? Did industrialization make life better for everyone? How is migration about human rights?
Comparative	Analyze and compare components of multiple phenomena	Which is better, a map or globe? How could Americans be happier?
Evaluative	Call for judgments on an issue	What symbol best represents the United States? Was the American Revolution avoidable?
Problem-based	Propose potential solutions to a social problem	What should be done about the gender wage gap? Should freedom be sacrificed in the name of national security?
Word-play	Juxtapose different meanings of words and ideas	Was the New Deal a new deal? Is free trade worth the price?
Mystery	Track the meanings below	What’s the real story behind the

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	the surface of an idea	purchase of Manhattan?
Ironic	Track the elements of unanswered questions	Is greed good? Can peace lead to war?

Criteria for Crafting a Compelling Question

- Does the question represent an important issue to historical and/or contemporary times?
- Is the question debatable?
- Does the question represent a reasonable amount of content?
- Will the question hold the sustained interest of students?
- Is the question suitable given the resources available?

What to Avoid When Crafting a Compelling Question

- Avoid cute questions- they may capture students' attention but the question may not be content meaty

Examples:

Where did you get that T-shirt?

Alternative: What happened to Rosie the Riveter?

- Avoid content-heavy questions- may not be student-friendly

Examples:

Does the GDP tell the whole story of a country's economic health?

Alternative: Does GDP tell the right story?