Ask This, Not That: Effective Questions for Higher-Order Thinking

Michelle Kowalsky & Martha Graham Viator

Getting Started: Questions Generated by Teacher Participants

1. What do you see?
2. What is he dressed in? Predict uniform material.
3. Describe who you think he is?
4. Why does he have a gun?
5. Where is he? Describe the setting.
6. How old do you think he is?
7. What year do you think the photo was taken? Why was it taken?
8. Do you think the soldier is on his way to fight or on his way back?
9. What do you observe about the soldier’s facial expression?
10. Compare and contrast this to a modern soldier.

How can you make these questions better?

Document Analysis Questions from Library of Congress

1. Describe what you see; what do you notice first?
2. How are the people and objects arranged?
3. What other details can you see?
4. Why do you think was the audience for this image?
5. What can you learn from examining this image?
6. What’s missing from this image?
7. Describe anything from this image that looks strange or unfamiliar?
8. Who would be interested in seeing this image?
9. If someone created this today, what would be different?
10. What do you wonder about?

For what other types of materials would these questions be useful?

Stems from Research on Reciprocal Interaction
(Alison King, 2013)

1. How would you use ... to ...?
2. What is a new example of ...?
3. Explain why...
4. What do you think would happen if ...?
5. What is the difference between ... and ...?
6. How are ... and ... similar?
7. What is a possible solution to the problem of ...?
8. What conclusions can you draw about...?
9. How does ... affect ...?
10. What are the strengths and weaknesses of ...?

How else can you control the quality of questioning?

Check Your Questioning Style for the Purpose at Hand

Do you want analysis? Then don’t ask factual questions.

Do you want critique? Then don’t ask opinion questions.

Do you need to scaffold content? Either ask the same question stems or use increasingly complex ones.

Do you need to differentiate learning? Vary the difficulty of your question stems for both easy and difficult topics.

Check out our website for more primary source prompts, teaching materials, hundreds of example questions, and more!

http://libguides.rowan.edu/tpsloc

http://www.rowan.edu