

## Essential Questions

The **ESSENTIAL QUESTION** sets the purpose and offers context for teaching the content you plan to cover.

### An Essential Question is:

- Complex
- Correlated to student interests
- Authentic (real world issues)
- Requires an action plan or decision-making on student's part
- Leads to outcomes (assessment)

### When developing an Essential Question:

- Determine the Concept (Theme) first  
[CONTENT is a study in CONCEPT]
- Then ask yourself:
  - Why do students need to know this?
  - What part of the content will I cover?
  - How will students use this information?
  - What will they learn to do that they aren't currently able to do? [objectives]
  - [Answers to the above questions should lead you to an Essential Question]
- The question should correspond to the concept you chose (see examples below...)

### Examples:

- **Solving Quadratic Equations** is a study in **Balance**
  - **Essential Questions:**
    - How can you increase the likelihood that the process you use to solve equations will result in the correct answer?
    - If you had to produce a lesson on solving quadratic equations, how would you teach that process?
- **Cell Mitosis** is a study in **Cycles**
  - **Essential Questions:**
    - How is cell mitosis like the life cycle?
    - Why is it important that the steps of cell mitosis happen correctly?
- **Tuck Everlasting** is a study in **Perspectives**
  - **Essential Questions:**
    - What are the qualities of a true friend?
    - Which character's perspective do you feel best represents the way you would feel about the Tucks' fate? Explain your answer.

- **Tuck Everlasting** is a study in **Choices and Consequences**
  - **Essential Questions:**
    - If you had the choice of living a normal life or living forever, which would you choose and why?
    - What are some of the positive and negative consequences associated with the Tucks' situation?
  
- **European Feudal System** is a study in **Structure**
  - **Essential Questions:**
    - What is your role in society? Create an action plan to help yourself achieve success in your life.
    - How is our society similar to and different from the structure of the feudal system of Europe?

**Once you have created the Essential Question:**

- Establish Scaffolding Questions that will help lead students toward answering the Essential Question
- Scaffolding questions are knowledge and comprehension level questions that help establish a foundation for understanding the content they are learning, and advance students toward developing a response to the Essential Question.
- Use **BLOOM'S TAXONOMY** to help form questions of varying levels of difficulty.

**Resources:**

<http://www.fno.org/nov97/toolkit.html>

**FNO.org: Questioning Toolkit**

Information about developing a variety of questions

<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>

**Learning Domains or Bloom's Taxonomy**

[http://www.cesa7.k12.wi.us/schoolimprove/curriculum/sample\\_guiding\\_or\\_essential\\_ques.htm](http://www.cesa7.k12.wi.us/schoolimprove/curriculum/sample_guiding_or_essential_ques.htm)

**Sample Guiding or Essential Questions**

Information from:

"Asking the Essential Question." Internet Innovations Incorporated. 29 May 1999. 27 Apr. 2005  
<<http://www.biopoint.com/ibr/askquestion.html>>.

McCarthy, Bernice. About Teaching: 4MAT in the Classroom. Wauconda: About Learning, Incorporated, 2000.