**Asking Students Text-Dependent Questions**

“The types of questions that students are asked about a text influence how they read it,” say Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey of San Diego State University in this helpful article in *Principal Leadership.* “If students are asked recall and recitation questions, they learn to read for that type of information. If they are asked synthesis questions, they learn to read for *that* type of information. Unfortunately, many of the questions that students are asked are about personal connections, which may not even require that they have read the text at all.”

For example, a teacher might ask students reading a chapter about the global water shortage, *Has your family made any changes to reduce water consumption?* An observer in this class might see a lively discussion and lots of student engagement – but how much actual reading and thinking was going on? “It is important that teachers know how to engage students beyond simply asking them to tell a personal story,” say Fisher and Frey. “The content itself can and should be used to engage.”

This is a key element in the Common Core language-arts standards: they challenge teachers to pose questions that require students to read the text carefully and produce evidence to support their responses, which builds a strong foundation of knowledge upon which to make personal connections. “The emphasis should be on using explicit and implicit information from the text to support reasoning,” say Fisher and Frey. They suggest seven types of text-dependent questions (not all of which need to be asked about an individual passage):

• *General understanding* – This type of question asks students to look for the gist of the text they have read.

• *Key details* – Asking students *who, what, where, when, why,* or *how*, including nuanced details. These questions should focus on important information in the text, not trivia.

• *Vocabulary* – Focusing on word definitions, using context or structure to figure out unfamiliar words, ideas or feelings evoked by key words, shades of meaning, word choice, figurative language, idioms, and confusing words or phrases.

• *Text structure* – Asking students to think about how the text is organized – for example, the use of character dialogue to propel action or the problem-and-solution structure.

• *Author’s purpose* – Asking whether the text intends to inform, entertain, persuade, or explain something, and whether the author has a particular bias and leaves out certain information.

• *Inferences* – Asking students how the parts of a text build to the overall point or effect. “This means that they must probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, or each key detail in literary text,” say Fisher and Frey. “Importantly, inference questions require students to read the entire selection so that they know where the text is going and how they can reconsider key points in the text as contributing elements of the whole.”

• *Opinions, arguments, inter-textual connections* – These questions should come after students have read and reread the text and developed their understanding through other types of questions.

“Text-Dependent Questions” by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey in *Principal Leadership*,

September 2012 (Vol. 13, #1, p. 70-73), [www.nassp.org/pl0912fisher](http://www.nassp.org/pl0912fisher); the authors can be reached at [dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu) and [nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu).

[*Back to page one*](#PageOne)