

MOVE TO THE MUSIC

Strategy: Text-Dependent Questions (TDQs)

What?

As the name suggests, a text-dependent question (TDQ) specifically asks something that can be answered only by referring explicitly back to the text being read. It does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text nor depend on students having other experiences or knowledge. Instead, it privileges the text itself and what students can extract from what is before them.

When?

During and after reading

Why?

Asking and answering TDQs is fundamental to close reading. The Common Core State Standards for reading strongly focus on students gathering evidence, knowledge and insight from what they read. Indeed, 80 to 90 percent of the Common Core's Reading Standards in each grade require text-dependent analysis.

TDQs build students' comprehension skills by necessitating close and deep reading. Research shows that too often when teachers ask questions about a text, most of the questions and discussion are not dependent on students having read or understood the text itself. Students should be given questions that they can only answer if they have read the text, and that require them to gather evidence from the text.

How?

Good TDQs focus attention on specific phrases and sentences to facilitate deep reading and ensure comprehension. They invite readers to dwell in the text, uncovering things that a more cursory reading would miss. TDQs should be constructed to engage the reader in increasingly higher levels of thinking, starting with *clarifying questions* and moving to interpretive questions. TDQs also ask readers to consider the text's style and structure. Students go beyond merely searching for the "right there" kinds of answers that don't demand thoughtful and mature engagement with the themes and ideas in the text.

Connection to anti-bias education

Questioning is a habit of mind necessary for becoming a thoughtful consumer of information and an aware member of any society. Anti-bias education challenges us to question ourselves and each other, as well as the power of the text. Effective TDQs put all readers on an equal footing by not privileging prior knowledge in a way can disadvantage certain students. At the same time, culturally responsive instruction relies in large part on using our students' funds of knowledge to engage them in learning. It is critical that text-to-self and text-to-world questions be woven into the sequence as well.

Use the critical-literacy question stems on the next page to facilitate a class discussion of the social-justice songs that your students bring to class.

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Critical-Literacy TDQs

Use these critical-literacy question models to create TDQs that examine the role of power and privilege in the central text. Be sure to craft each question so it requires students to defend and explain their responses with references to the text being studied. In this activity, the texts being studied are your students' songs.

1. Textual Purposes

What is this song about? How do we know?
Who would be most likely to listen to this song and why?
What does the performer of this song want us to know?

2. Textual Structures and Features

What are the structures and features of this song?
What do the song's images suggest?
What kind of language is used in the song?

3. Construction of Characters

How are children, teenagers, young adults, and/or adults constructed in this song?
Why has the songwriter constructed the characters in this way?

4. Power and Interest

Who benefits from listening to this song?
What knowledge does the listener need to understand this song?
How does the song depict age, gender, cultural groups?
Whose views are excluded or privileged in the song? Who is allowed to speak? Who is quoted?

5. Gaps and Silences

Are there gaps (something left out of this song) for the listener to fill in?
Are there silences in this song that leave out certain viewpoints or voices?
What questions does the song not raise?

6. Whose View? Whose Reality?

What view(s) of the world is the song presenting?
What kind(s) of social realities does the song portray?
How would the song be different if it were told in another time, place, or culture?

7. Interrogating the Author

What kind of person wrote the song? What are his or her interests and values?
What view of the world and values does the songwriter/performer assume the listener holds? How do we know?

8. Multiple Meanings

What different interpretations of the song are possible?
How do contextual factors influence how the song is interpreted?
How else could the song have been written?