

ENGAGING THE ADOLESCENT LEARNER

BY DOUGLAS FISHER AND NANCY FREY



Text-Dependent Questions



The Common Core State Standards have generated renewed interest in the types of questions students

are asked related to the readings they do. This is due, in part, to the fact that students can answer many of the questions that teachers ask without ever reading the text. These text-independent questions are often interesting and generate a lot of discussion, but they do not ensure that students understand what they have read or that they can take issue with the author's perspective. Instead, they encourage students to make connections with their personal life

What Makes a Text Worthy?

There is considerable debate about what makes a text worthy. Some argue that the enduring nature of the classical, canonical literature is worthy, while others argue that texts that focus on contemporary issues are also worthy. For classroom use, worthy texts are those that allow readers to reflect on themselves and their actions; invite them in the worlds of others; understand the biological, social, or physical world; or solve problems that are timely and important. Texts worthy of instruction also allow students to develop their literary prowess and become informed citizens. Although there is not a clear-cut definition and wide-spread agreement about worthy texts, there are texts worth studying. Importantly, not every text a reader reads needs to be interrogated at the level discussed in this column.

and move further and further away from what the author offered. In this column, we focus on text-dependent questions that require students to provide evidence from the text as they justify their responses.

Text-Dependent Questions

Generally speaking, text-dependent questions require that students have actually read the text. They are questions that are answered through close reading of a complex and worthy text (see [January 2012 column](#)). Text-dependent questions require that the evidence comes from text, not information from outside sources. That does not mean that they are simply recall questions. Although some text-dependent questions do require that students demonstrate an understanding of the factual information found in the text, the questions should also require an understanding beyond basic facts.

For example, consider the following two questions that could be asked of readers studying the Declaration of Independence:

1. If you were present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, what would you do?
2. What are the reasons listed in the preamble for supporting the authors' argument to separate from Great Britain?

The first question, perhaps an attempt to focus on the ethical decisions of the founding fathers, does not actually require that students read the document to respond. That's not to suggest that these types of questions are never asked, but rather that they are often asked prematurely, before a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the text has taken place. In order to gain that deeper understanding of the text, students are asked a number of questions that ensure their careful attention to it and what the author(s) offered.

The second question requires that students carefully consider the information presented in the text and provide evidence from the text in their responses. In addition, questions like this create a stronger conceptual foundation from which students can support their answers with specificity and detail. Knowing what you would do in a similar circumstance is vital,



but making a difficult ethical decision requires knowing a great deal about the circumstances. The intent of text-dependent questions during close reading is to build that foundation so that students can eventually answer the former using critical thinking, not just vague and unsupported claims.

What Happened to Reader Response?

A prevailing theory that explains the relationship between readers and texts is reader response (Rosenblatt, 1995). This theory essentially replaced the New Critical theory approach that is wholly text-based and assumes that meaning resides within the text (Langer, 1994). New Critical theory focused instruction on the accurate and “correct” interpretation of the text, often through

an analysis of the narrator and the point of view (Welleck & Warren, 1949). As an alternative, reader response theory suggests that

a work of literature is an inert text that can hardly be said to have more than a potential for meaning until it is called into being by a reader who constructs a reading, thereby giving meaning to the text. (Blau, 1994, p. 26)

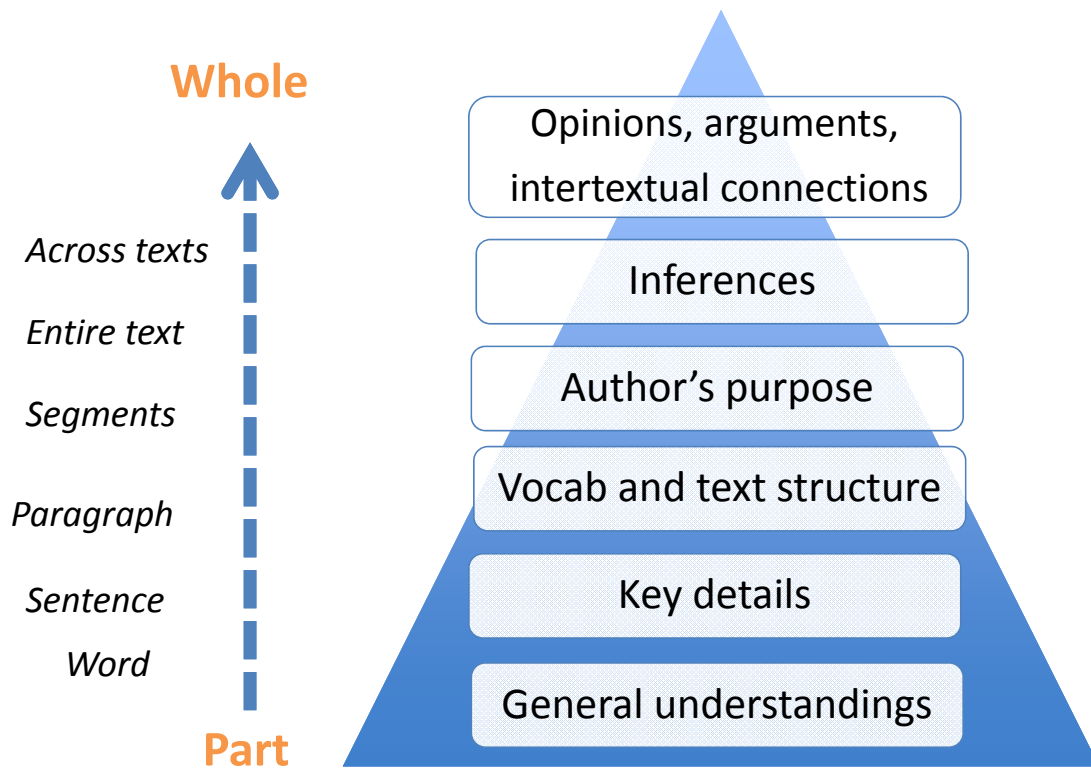
Having said that, it is important to note that Rosenblatt (1995) did not focus exclusively on the reader, but rather the *transaction* between the reader and the text. In her words, “the reader must remain faithful to the author’s text and must be alert to the potential clues concerning character and motive” (p. 11). Rosenblatt cautioned that readers might ignore elements in a text and fail to realize that they

are “imputing to the author views unjustified by the text” (p. 11).

And this is what text-dependent questions should do, ensure that readers remain faithful to and come to understand the author’s views. Students don’t have to agree with the author (in fact, we encourage them to challenge the text), but rather that they understand the points the author has made so that they can challenge it with evidence.

Types of Text-Dependent Questions

As indicated in Figure 1, there are a number of different topics for which text-dependent questions can be developed. There are questions that focus on parts of texts, and there are questions that focus on whole texts.



Source: Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (in press). *Common Core State Standards in Literacy (Grades 3–5)*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

FIGURE 1 Progression of Text-Dependent Questions

As we have noted, these types of questions have one thing in common: They require that readers have read and understood the text. Ideally, some text-dependent questions that students are asked will require that they return to the text and reread to find evidence.

Figure 1 also suggests something about the frequency of types of text-

dependent questions. For example, general understanding and key detail questions occur more frequently than inferences and opinions. This should not be seen as a rigid hierarchy or that the questions must be asked in this order. However, it is essential to understand that different types of knowledge are utilized when deeply understanding a text. We provide this graphic and

explanation of each type of question so that teachers can plan lessons that include text-dependent questions.

It is also important to note that simply asking text-dependent questions will not ensure that students suddenly develop the ability to read and understand complex texts. Students still need to be taught how to read deeply, and how to respond with evidence from the text. As we will discuss in greater detail, teachers should model for students how they think about texts and how they look for evidence in the text when responding to questions. For now, we'll focus on the types of questions that are useful in ensuring students have read the text. For each type of question, we'll provide examples of questions that Mr. Cale asked of his 8th graders as they studied "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll (1872).

General understandings. These questions ensure that students grasp the overall view of the text. Often they are global questions, but questions that require that students demonstrate an understanding of what the author really said. Depending on the type of text, these questions may probe the sequence of information presented, the story arc, the main claim and evidence presented, or the gist of a given passage.

For "Jabberwocky," Mr. Cale asked, "What is the progress of the hero?" As students worked in their triads to construct the story arc, Mr. Cale moved from group to group, checking their understanding. As members of each group returned to the text for discussion, they charted their understanding with variations of the fact that the hero had a warning, set off to deal with the monster, experienced conquest, and returned triumphantly.

Key details. These text-dependent questions require that readers pay attention to the details. As such, they

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Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

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Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Source: From *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872

FIGURE 2 "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll



are able to respond to questions that ask *who, what, when, where, why, how much, or how many*. They also must search for nuances in meaning, determine importance of ideas, and find supporting details for the main ideas.

For “Jabberwocky,” Mr. Cale asked questions to ensure that students were making sense of the nonsense words as well as the fact that the Jabberwock was slain, such as, “What were the slithy toves doing in the wabe?” The students quickly answered “gyre and gimble.” “But what does that mean?” Mr. Cale asked. “How would you describe the condition of the borogoves?” He let the students struggle a bit longer with the text before sharing some of the information that Lewis Carroll provided at the time of publication, namely that *gyre* in the second line is “to scratch” and *gimble* is defined as “to bore holes.” “Does that help?” he asked, and they nodded. Then he turned his attention to the main idea, asking, “Who killed the Jabberwock?” The students read,

and reread the poem, certain that they would find the answer. Finally, one group said, “It’s got to be anonymous. There are all kinds of words we don’t know, but none of the stanzas tell us who the boy is. That detail isn’t there.”

Vocabulary and text structure.

These text-dependent questions focus on the specific words and phrases the author uses as well as the structure of the text. This requires that the reader bridge literal and inferential meanings, noting both denotation (literal or primary word meanings) and connotation (the idea or feeling that a word invokes) as well as the shades of meaning elicited by the word choice. For example, an author might use the words *walk, stroll, amble, saunter, meander, or wander*. The shades of meaning are different, and readers should take note of these choices. Further, readers should notice figurative language and how the organization of the text contributes to meaning.

Mr. Cale decided to ask about specific words in the key details due to the fact that Lewis Carroll used a number of nonsense words. In developing questions about vocabulary and text structure, he wanted to focus on the real words and the structure of the poem, starting with the questions, “What type of poem is this? Knowing the structure, what do we expect?” For the first question, every group identified the poem as a ballad, in which the identical first and last four lines enclose five stanzas. They also discussed the idea that this would have been sung or chanted aloud and that this specific type, heroic, should chart the progress of the hero.

Author’s purpose. Although often not specifically stated, there is a purpose for each text. Sometimes, the genre helps the reader understand the author’s purpose. Was the specific text written to entertain, explain, inform, or persuade? Other times, the way in which the author constructs the text—the point of view—helps readers determine the purpose. First-person texts tell the reader one thing while third-person limited versus omniscient tells the reader something else. Further, texts are told from a specific vantage point, and readers want to know, whose story is *not* represented?

Mr. Cale asked his students about the author’s purpose, including the choice of narrator. As students discussed this, he noted their understanding of the difference between first person and third person and the influence that point of view has on understanding and perspective.

Inferences. Inferences are more than guesses or simply telling students to “read between the lines.” Readers should know how to probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole. Text-dependent

questions should allow students to consider the information that is provided and then make informed extrapolations from the information provided.

When Mr. Cale moved to inference questions, he started with a fairly obvious one. “How did the narrator know the Jabberwock was dead, not the Jubjub bird or Bandersnatch?” The conversation was lively and included a discussion about bringing back the head of the Jabberwock. Several students noted that this was common in history, to keep the head to show that the enemy was really dead. He

then asked, “What can we infer about the Jabberwock, given the text and his name?” As the students discussed this with their groups, most believed that it was a monster citing evidence that it has “jaws that bite and claws that catch.” Others said that the name was important: “Jabber is to talk a lot, my moms says that all of the time, so I think that it could be one of those birds that copies what people say, but a mean one.” Mr. Cale noted the confusion that his students had about inferencing and decided to model his thinking aloud for students to provide them with additional practice in this area.

Opinions, arguments, and intertextual connections. The final category of text-dependent questions are often the questions that teachers like to ask because these questions tend to generate a lot of discussion and personal connections. When they follow a discussion built on text-dependent questions, they work well for this purpose. If they are used in place of text-dependent questions, the risk is that students will answer and not need to read the text. As such, teachers can unintentionally telegraph a message to students suggesting that reading and understanding are not necessary. When these questions are used, they can analyze claims, evidence, and counterclaims. They can also encourage students to consider logic and rhetoric, such as ethos, logos, and pathos (see sidebar).

Mr. Cale offered students the choice between two questions for their group to consider. They were to summarize their responses in writing. He reminded them that they had to use evidence from the text in their discussions about their answers. These were the options:

1. According to the poem, how should we construct our notions of good and evil?
2. Why is the hero of the poem—the ultimate good guy who slays the Jabberwock—anonymus?

The students knew a great deal about this poem; they understood it fairly well because of the questions they were asked and the interactions they had with their peers and their teachers. One group summarized their response as follows:

There is a lot of evil in the world. The parent tells his son to beware. But the son is good and wants to take care of the problem. He leaves on a journey to fight the evil beings—Jabberwock, Jubjub

According to Aristotle, rhetoric is “the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion.”

He described three main forms of rhetoric: ethos, logos, and pathos.

- ◆ Ethos—appeal based on the character of the speaker
- ◆ Logos—appeal based on logic or reason
- ◆ Pathos—appeal based on emotion

The table below summarizes some of the appeals according to the means of persuasion (source: www.public.asu.edu/~macalla/logosethospathos.html).

Ethos	Logos	Pathos
Language appropriate to audience and subject	Theoretical, abstract language	Vivid, concrete language
Restrained, sincere, fair minded presentation	Literal and historical analogies	Emotionally loaded language
Appropriate level of vocabulary	Definitions	Connotative meanings
Correct grammar	Factual data and statistics	Emotional examples
	Quotations	Vivid descriptions
	Citations from experts and authorities	Narratives of emotional events
	Informed opinions	Emotional tone
		Figurative language

bird, and Bandersnatch—taking his sword. In this poem, good won over bad but there is still more evil in the world because the Jubjub bird and Bandersnatch are still alive.

Text-Dependent Questions for Informational Texts

The students in Ms. Schaefer's class are learning about Russia in the 1920s. At this point in the semester, the students have learned about the Russian Revolution and the removal and murder of the Romanov family. They understand the difference between economic systems (e.g., socialism and capitalism) and government structures (e.g., monarchy, democracy, communism). As part of their class, they regularly encounter complex texts. They are also practiced at productive group work and know that their teacher models her thinking for them.

One of the texts they read is *Industrialization of the Country, 1928* by Joseph Stalin (see Figure 3). Ms. Schaefer asks her students to read the text independently, annotating key points and big ideas. She then invites her students to talk with a partner about the purpose of the text by asking them, "What was Stalin trying to accomplish in this speech?" The answers vary but are centered on the idea that Stalin wanted to motivate his people to focus on industry. Several groups note that the motivation was to compete with other countries. As Marco says, "I think Stalin was so focused on Germany because of World War I. Germany declared war on Russia and a lot of Russian people died."

Concerned that her students will drift too far away from the text, making connections prematurely with World War I as well as current events, she asks them to look closely at the text and determine "in which areas are the Soviet Union behind, at least according to Stalin?" She reminds

them to record their information on their graphic organizers so they can use their notes when they write their reports. The groups search the text and identify industry and technology. She then asks, "Who is Stalin saying his country is behind? The obvious answer is Germany, but there is more to it. Take a look and talk with your group." As the students reread and discuss, they identify France.

Ms. Schaefer decides to model some of her thinking for her students since they have missed a key point in Stalin's speech. She says,

I'm thinking about the line when Stalin says 'outstrip them in one stroke' because he doesn't say *it*, meaning one country, he says *them*. I want to reread that section and see if I can figure out who Stalin is referring to. I know that he has a beef with Germany overall, but the word *them* is important. When I reread I noticed that he says 'capitalist countries' and there are several of them. I think that



Between 1928 and 1933, Stalin inaugurated the First and Second Five-Year Plans to achieve his goal of rapid industrialization. In many respects he was successful—by 1939 the USSR was behind only the United States and Germany in industrial output. The human costs, however, were enormous.

The question of a fast rate of development of industry would not face us so acutely as it does now if we had such a highly developed industry and such a highly developed technology as Germany, say, and if the relative importance of industry in the entire national economy were as high in our country as it is in Germany, for example. If that were the case, we could develop our industry at a slower rate without fearing to fall behind the capitalist countries and knowing that we could outstrip them at one stroke. But then we should not be so seriously backward technically and economically as we are now. The whole point is that we are behind Germany in this respect and are still far from having overtaken her technically and economically.

The question of a fast rate of development of industry would not face us so acutely if we were not the only country but one of the countries of the dictatorship of the proletariat, if there were a proletarian dictatorship not only in our country but in other, more advanced countries as well, Germany and France, say.

If that were the case, the capitalist encirclement could not be so serious a danger as it is now, the question of the economic independence of our country would naturally recede into the background, we could integrate ourselves into the system of more developed proletarian states, we could receive from them machines for making our industry and agriculture more productive, supplying them in turn with raw materials and foodstuffs, and we could, consequently, expand our industry at a slower rate. But you know very well that that is not yet the case and that we are still the only country of the proletarian dictatorship and are surrounded by capitalist countries, many of which are far in advance of us technically and economically.

Internal conditions. But besides the external conditions, there are also internal conditions which dictate a fast rate of development of our industry as the main foundation of our entire national economy. I am referring to the extreme backwardness of our agriculture, of its technical and cultural level. I am referring to the existence in our country of an overwhelming preponderance of small commodity producers, with their scattered and utterly backward production, compared with which our large-scale socialist industry is like an island in the midst of the sea, an island whose base is expanding daily, but which is nevertheless an island in the midst of the sea.

External conditions. We have assumed power in a country whose technical equipment is terribly backward. Along with a few big industrial units more or less based upon modern technology, we have hundreds and thousands of mills and factories the technical equipment of which is beneath all criticism from the point of view of modern achievements. At the same time we have around us a number of capitalist countries whose industrial technique is far more developed and up-to-date than that of our country. Look at the capitalist countries and you will see that their technology is not only advancing, but advancing by leaps and bounds, outstripping the old forms of industrial technique. And so we find that, on the one hand, we in our country have the most advanced system, the Soviet system, and the most advanced type of state power in the world, Soviet power, while, on the other hand, our industry, which should be the basis of socialism and of Soviet power, is extremely backward technically. Do you think that we can achieve the final victory of socialism in our country so long as this contradiction exists?

What has to be done to end this contradiction? To end it, we must overtake and outstrip the advanced technology of the developed capitalist countries. We have overtaken and outstripped the advanced capitalist countries in the sense of establishing a new political system, the Soviet system. That is good. But it is not enough. In order to secure the final victory of socialism in our country, we must also overtake and outstrip these countries technically and economically. Either we do this, or we shall be forced to the wall.

Source: From Joseph Stalin, "Industrialization of the Country and the Right Deviation in the C.P.S.U., November 19, 1928," in J.V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 11, 1928–March 1929 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), pp. 257–58, 261–63.

Stalin is trying to tell his people that the world is leaving them behind and that it's bigger than their problems with Germany because he says that they are 'seriously backward' which is really offensive, or it would be to me if I heard this speech about my people. So I think he must be trying to tell people that their country is at risk when compared with a lot of other countries, not just Germany and Spain.

To return them to the text, she asks, "How does Stalin feel about 'capitalist countries'?" The students are quick to respond to this. The students talk about envy, namely that "Stalin is really jealous of what the capitalist countries have and maybe a little fearful that they will be taken over by these countries." They note, "He even says that 'we shall be forced to the wall' which is how they put people in the firing squad to kill them."

She then asks students to identify the goals that Stalin has. They talk about making industry more productive and providing food for the people. The students also discuss the idea the USSR is "surrounded by capitalist countries" and that Stalin seems afraid of that because they are more advanced technically and economically. One student, Annalisa, said, "I see a little fear in this because of his word choice *surrounded*. It's like he's looking to every border of his country and seeing places that are better off. It's really a call to action, I think."

As their close reading continues, Ms. Schaefer asks her students why Stalin believes that the people of USSR must support his five-year plan. She also asks students to identify the key ideas in this speech by asking, "What does Stalin want his people to do, specifically?" As students infer the connotations of *outstrip* and *overtake*, they develop an appreciation for the tension between the two countries.



The next question requires students to make connections between several texts and their background knowledge. Ms. Schaefer asks, "If you were President of the United States, or the leader of another capitalist country, and you heard this speech, what would you be thinking?" The students begin talking about being "on alert" and worrying that "they were going to steal our secrets and try to have better machines than us."

And her final question, "For whom was this speech written?" generated a great deal of discussion. Jeremy summarized his groups thinking by saying,

Obviously, he was speaking to the people of the USSR. But he had to know that the leaders of other countries would hear or read his speech, so there are things he includes to put them on notice that the conflict is not over. The best evidence we have for this is his line, 'Do you think that we can achieve the final victory of socialism in our country

so long as this contradiction exists.' Stalin is saying that the final, final victory is not yet determined. Yes, they have an advanced 'state power' but they have not yet had victory.

It's More Than Recall

Text-dependent questions do not have to exclusively focus on recall and recitation of information. Instead, they can be invitations for students to think deeply about a text and compare it with their own perspectives and experiences. Text-dependent questions do require that students provide evidence from the text and encourage students to reread the text. As we have noted, not all texts require this level of investigation. Sometimes, students read for pleasure and entertainment. Other times, readers want or need to understand the text at a much deeper level. In those cases, text-dependent questions can guide students' thinking and build habits that they can apply widely.

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Sciences High and Middle College. They are interested in quality instruction for diverse learners and are coauthors with Diane Lapp of *Text Complexity: Raising Rigor in Reading* (International Reading Association, 2012). You may contact Doug at dfisher@mail.sdsu.edu and Nancy at nfrey@mail.sdsu.edu.

Additional Resources From IRA

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2012). *Text complexity: Raising rigor in reading*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Selecting appropriate reading material for students is hard. For decades, teachers have known that quality instruction requires a careful matching of materials to students. The goal is to select materials that are neither too difficult nor too easy for students—a phenomenon sometimes called the Goldilocks Rule. To ensure that students learn to read increasingly complex texts, teachers have to understand what makes a text hard. The introduction of the Common Core State Standards has also placed a spotlight on text complexity. This book focuses on the quantitative and qualitative factors of text complexity as well as the ways in which readers can be matched with texts and tasks. It also examines how close readings of complex texts scaffold students understanding and allow them to develop the skills necessary to read like a detective.

Fordham, N.W. (2006). Crafting questions that address comprehension strategies in content reading. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 49 (5), pp. 390–396.

This article describes initial attempts by preservice and inservice teachers enrolled in university reading courses to devise questions that encourage students to read content texts strategically. Teachers at both levels tended to confuse questions that encourage the use of comprehension strategies during reading with questions that assess comprehension of what has been read. Despite understanding the aspects of cognition that promote good comprehension, at first these elementary and middle-grade teachers appeared to revert to ingrained questioning models that largely ignored the cognitive components of comprehension.

The distinction between the design and functions of these questions must be clear to teachers if they are to be effective in helping students construct meaning from subject matter texts. University classes that provide modeling and practice in crafting and asking strategic questions support content teachers in this important skill.

Simon, C.A. (2011). *Question the author*. Retrieved March 22, 2012, from www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/question-author-30761.html

At times, engaging all students with a text that they are reading can seem quite difficult. Question the Author (QtA) is a comprehension strategy that asks students to pose queries *while* reading a given text, helping to solidify their knowledge and challenge their understanding, rather than *after* reading. QtA, which is primarily used with nonfiction texts (but can be used with fiction, as well), engages students with the text to create deeper meaning by allowing students to critique the authors' writing.

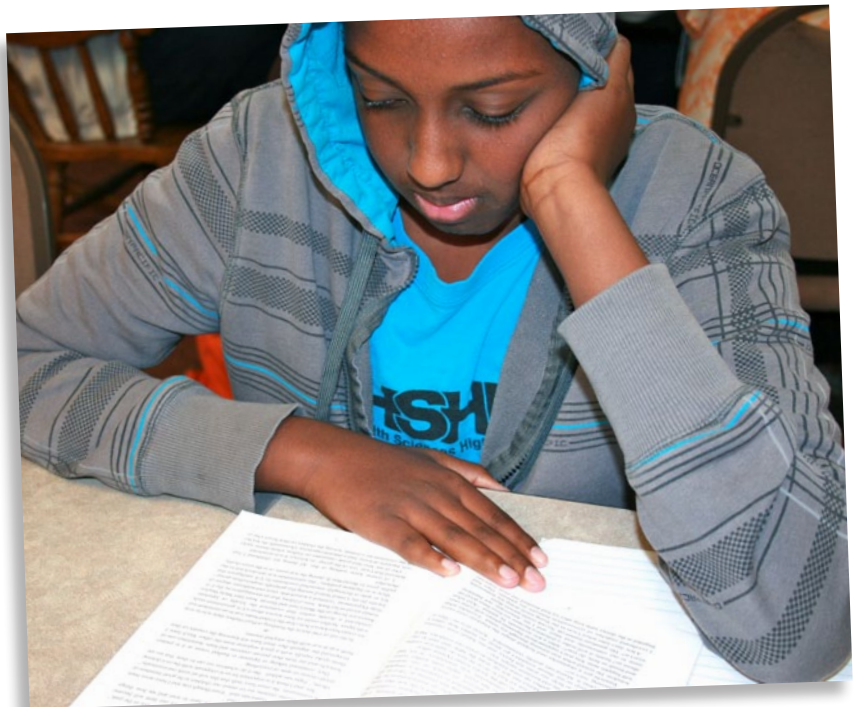
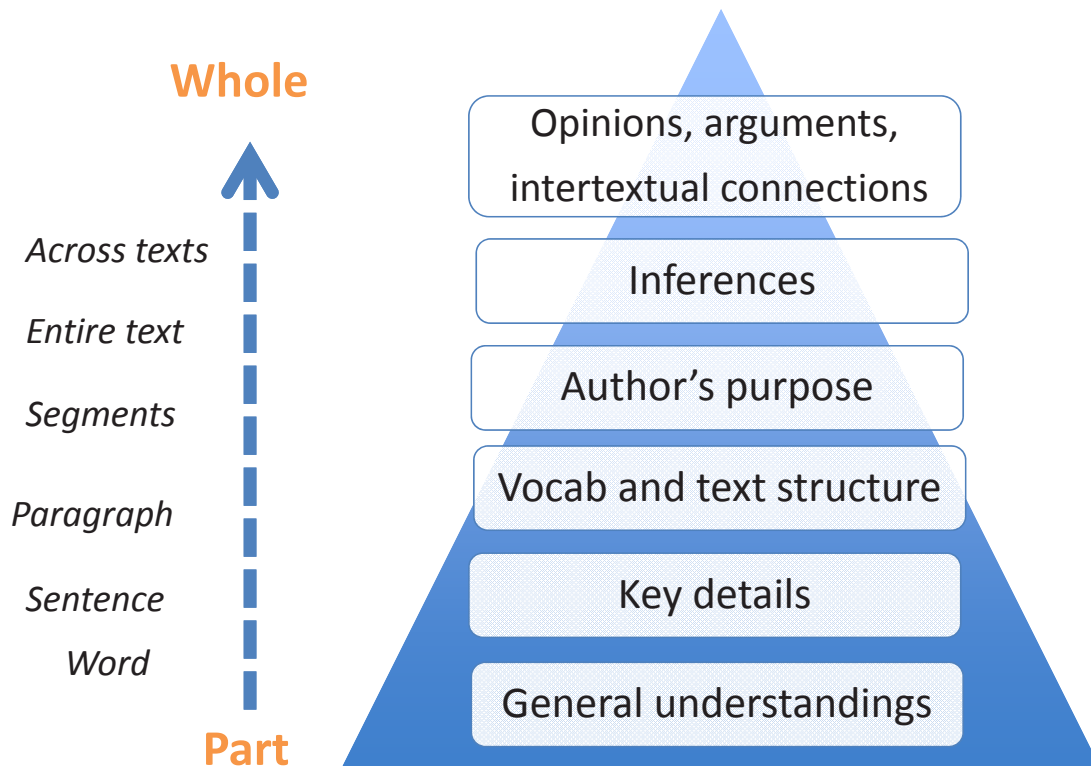


FIGURE 1. Progression of Text-Dependent Questions



Source: Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (in press). *Common Core State Standards in Literacy (Grades 3–5)*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

FIGURE 2. "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll

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FIGURE 3. Joseph Stalin (1879-1953): Industrialization of the Country, 1928

Between 1928 and 1933, Stalin inaugurated the First and Second Five-Year Plans to achieve his goal of rapid industrialization. In many respects he was successful—by 1939 the USSR was behind only the United States and Germany in industrial output. The human costs, however, were enormous.

The question of a fast rate of development of industry would not face us so acutely as it does now if we had such a highly developed industry and such a highly developed technology as Germany, say, and if the relative importance of industry in the entire national economy were as high in our country as it is in Germany, for example. If that were the case, we could develop our industry at a slower rate without fearing to fall behind the capitalist countries and knowing that we could outstrip them at one stroke. But then we should not be so seriously backward technically and economically as we are now. The whole point is that we are behind Germany in this respect and are still far from having overtaken her technically and economically.

The question of a fast rate of development of industry would not face us so acutely if we were not the only country but one of the countries of the dictatorship of the proletariat, if there were a proletarian dictatorship not only in our country but in other, more advanced countries as well, Germany and France, say.

If that were the case, the capitalist encirclement could not be so serious a danger as it is now, the question of the economic independence of our country would naturally recede into the background, we could integrate ourselves into the system of more developed proletarian states, we could receive from them machines for making our industry and agriculture more productive, supplying them in turn with raw materials and foodstuffs, and we could, consequently, expand our industry at a slower rate. But you know very well that that is not yet the case and that we are still the only country of the proletarian dictatorship and are surrounded by capitalist countries, many of which are far in advance of us technically and economically.

Internal conditions. But besides the external conditions, there are also internal conditions which dictate a fast rate of development of our industry as the main foundation of our entire national economy. I am referring to the extreme backwardness of our agriculture, of its technical and cultural level. I am referring to the existence in our country of an overwhelming preponderance of small commodity producers, with their scattered and utterly backward production, compared with which our large-scale socialist industry is like an island in the midst of the sea, an island whose base is expanding daily, but which is nevertheless an island in the midst of the sea.

External conditions. We have assumed power in a country whose technical equipment is terribly backward. Along with a few big industrial units more or less based upon modern technology, we have hundreds and thousands of mills and factories the technical equipment of which is beneath all criticism from the point of view of modern achievements. At the same time we have around us a number of capitalist countries whose industrial technique is far more developed and up-to-date than that of our country. Look at the capitalist countries and you will see that their technology is not only advancing, but advancing by leaps and bounds, outstripping the old forms of industrial technique. And so we find that, on the one hand, we in our country have the most advanced system, the Soviet system, and the most advanced type of state power in the world, Soviet power, while, on the other hand, our industry, which should be the basis of socialism and of Soviet power, is extremely backward technically. Do you think that we can achieve the final victory of socialism in our country so long as this contradiction exists?

What has to be done to end this contradiction? To end it, we must overtake and outstrip the advanced technology of the developed capitalist countries. We have overtaken and outstripped the advanced capitalist countries in the sense of establishing a new political system, the Soviet system. That is good. But it is not enough. In order to secure the final victory of socialism in our country, we must also overtake and outstrip these countries technically and economically. Either we do this, or we shall be forced to the wall.

Source: From Joseph Stalin, "Industrialization of the Country and the Right Deviation in the C.P.S.U., November 19, 1928," in J.V. Stalin, *Works*, vol. 11, 1928–March 1929 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), pp. 257–58, 261–63.