

Who Asks Questions? Teacher's Notes

Jack and Jill went up the hill
to fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown
and Jill came tumbling after.

Grouping: Whole class

Strategy: Discussion

Administration: Nursery rhyme on board or chart paper; pencils and response sheets

Focus: Looking for questions that generate rich answers

If some students are unfamiliar with this rhyme, you may need to do some preparatory work. It is always interesting to consider the word "crown," which has different meanings. The royal one is the more interesting for younger children. It is a good idea to decide together which meaning would be the most interesting to follow.

Teacher: Here is the situation: the children are in hospital; they are in satisfactory condition, but they are not allowed to have any visitors yet. To whom could we speak in order to find out what happened?

Students and teacher make a list.

Now that we have our list, what sorts of questions would we have for each of these people?

Students talk about how those questions would change, depending upon who was asking them and to whom they were talking.

In groups of three, set your chairs in a circle. *(They do.)*

Decide on the person you want to interview. *(They do.)*

Choose someone in your group to respond in that role. *(They do.)*

Decide together who would be asking the questions. *(They do.)*

Think for a moment about the attitudes and points of view of the roles you all have decided upon. Those attitudes and points of view help you form your questions and shape your replies. For example, if we were a group of social workers who think that the rhyme tells a story of unsupervised children, how would that change or color the questions we ask and how we ask them?

When you are ready, you may begin.

The teacher circulates, listening for questions that generate rich responses.

Stop now. Just think quietly about what you have heard. *(They do.)*

Reflection prompts: What sorts of questions did you find to be the most useful?

Who heard something that they hadn't thought of?

Who found themselves surprised by what they were saying?

Extension: You might take the story of Hansel and Gretel. Share it so that everyone agrees on the story's main events. Use the same framework as above, or have the class in role as the People for Better Parents group whose members speak to one or both of the children about best practices in parenting.

Who Asks Questions? Response Form

Here is a list of people whose business it is to ask questions. You may add to this list if you find others.

interviewer	inquisitor
journalist	devil's advocate
doctor	teacher
lawyer	shopkeeper
police officer	psychiatrist/psychologist
detective	children
researcher	politicians (depending on which side of the House they sit)
someone who has been away	social worker
interrogator	conscience
alien	others? _____

1. In this list of roles, who asks questions to which they already know the answer?

2. What might be some reasons that cause people to ask questions to which they already know the answer?

3. Here is a question that we ask every day: "So, what have you been up to?" Choose three people from the list above and decide how each would phrase that everyday question to discover what they need to know.

Example: Shopkeeper: Hello, Mrs. Jones. I haven't seen you for some time. Been away?

Role: _____ Question: _____

Role: _____ Question: _____

Role: _____ Question: _____

4. Remember the story of Cinderella? If you had only three questions you could ask, what would they be and of whom would you ask them?

Question: _____

_____ Name: _____

Question: _____

_____ Name: _____

Question: _____

_____ Name: _____

Building Questions upon Questions: Teacher's Notes

Here, students are both question askers and question responders. Their engagement and their learning will be deepened because they are driving the explorations for themselves. The activities are introduced from the teacher's viewpoint.

Preparation:

The class reads a novel, poem, play, or short story, or views a film, documentary, or a piece of art.

Activity 1 Using your response sheet, write down three questions that you would like answered about this material. (**Task 1**)

Activity 2 With a partner, try to answer each other's questions.

Activity 3 With your partner, decide on three questions for which you would both like to find the answers. You may use questions you already have, or perhaps there are new questions that you have because of your conversation. (**Task 2**)

Activity 4 Each pair joins with another pair. Exchange questions and give your answers.

Activity 5 In your group of four, settle on one question that you all feel is powerful enough to engage the whole class in discussion. When you have decided, choose someone to come up and write it on the board. (**Task 3**)

Activity 6 Now, we have a great list of questions. Where shall we begin our discussion?

The questions generate a reflective discussion that serves both to deepen understanding of the material and offer opportunities for re-teaching, if needed. Although what the questions open up for discussion is more important (Activity 7), you might also explore with the students the criteria on which they based their choices of powerful questions (Activity 8).

Activity 7 Using your response sheet, take a moment to reflect on any changes in your thinking about the material (*reflecting on meaning*).

Activity 8 Write about what you think makes a powerful question (*reflecting on process*).

Adapted from R. McTeague, *Shared Reading in the Middle and High School Years* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992), p. 52.

Building Questions upon Questions: Response Form

Task 1: List your three questions below.

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

Task 2: List the three questions that you and your partner have decided upon.

Question 1:

Question 2:

Question 3:

Task 3: Write the powerful question that your group has decided upon.

Reflection: How has your thinking changed?

What makes a question powerful?
