

# Essential Questions

## *Essence*

- ***root:*** from the Latin “essentia” meaning “being.”
- ***definition:*** the permanent, not accidental, element of being
- ***synonyms:*** being, soul, substance

Merriam–Webster Online  
Dictionary and Thesaurus

Synonyms for:

*Knowledge*

*Skills*

*Understanding*

In a nutshell:

To acquire **KNOWLEDGE** (facts) we use **SKILLS** to gain **UNDERSTANDING** (applicability) which enables us to apply and to transfer the knowledge.

When we truly understand and transfer our learning, we

- can explain;
- can interpret;
- can apply;
- have perspective;
- can empathize;
- have self-knowledge.

Wiggins and McTighe  
*The Understanding by Design  
Guide to Creating High-Quality Units*  
2011

If transfer is the key to teaching or understanding, good questions are both the cause of and the means by which greater understanding happens.

Wiggins and McTighe  
*Understanding by Design*  
2005

The best questions serve as doorways through which learners explore the key concepts, themes, issues, and problems that reside within the content, perhaps as yet unseen: it is through the process of actively “interrogating” the content through provocative questions that deepen understanding.

Wiggins and McTighe  
*Understanding by Design*  
2005

## Essential Questions:

- demand transfer beyond the topic in which we initially encounter them;
- recur throughout our lives;
- point to the core of big ideas;
- can help make sense of complicated ideas;
- can hook and hold our attention

adapted: Wiggins and McTighe  
2005



## Moreover, essential questions

- cause inquiry;
- provoke thought;
- cause one to consider alternatives;
- stimulate rethinking;
- spark connections with prior learning;
- invoke transferability.

Paul Beaudin, Ph.D.

Iona College

2012

## Overarching:

What lessons have we learned or not learned from US military involvement in foreign regional conflicts?

## Topical:

What lessons should we learn from the Vietnam War?

Wiggins and McTighe

*Understanding by Design*

2005

## **Overarching:**

What causes war?

## **Topical:**

How do the causes of the Civil War compare to one other war you've learned about?

## **Nonessential (but important to the teacher)**

What caused the Civil War?

# Practice

## Grades 4–5 Text Exemplars

### Poetry:

Thayer, Ernest Lawrence, *Casey at the Bat*

Common Core Standards

*ELA and Literacy in History/ Social Studies,  
Science and Technical Subjects*

Appendix B