

Developing Questions for Literature Discussion

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In an article about authentic questions, Beverly Bushing and Betty Ann Slesinger wisely remind teachers that "Whether a question is about facts or concepts is less important than whether a question is a part of something significant." (Page 344. For complete citations, see "Additional Resources" in the library guide.) Still, when developing questions to support students in a literary discussion, it is helpful to think of questions in three categories: **factual, interpretive, and evaluative.**

Factual questions have only one correct answer based on the text. While these questions typically don't form the basis for a literary discussion, posing them is often necessary to help students clarify facts and sort through details.

Interpretive questions have more than one correct answer based on the text. These questions often begin with the words "How" ("How does Jonas feel when he first notices color in an apple?") or "Why" ("Why does Jonas believe that giving up things like color and sunshine can't justify the safety of the world he has grown up in?").

Evaluative questions are those in which a student's response is based on values or a choice of action in a similar situation ("If you were Jonas, how would you feel when chosen to be 'The Receiver of Memory?'" or "If you were told when you were twelve what job you would do for the rest of your life, how would you feel?").

Many experienced discussion leaders like to begin with interpretive questions because they afford the opportunity for a number of possible "good" answers. Because such questions are necessarily thought-provoking, students are often given the opportunity to jot down a brief answer before discussion begins.

Material from the *Conversations in Literature* Web site (www.learner.org/envisioningliterature) can provide further support as you develop effective questions for literature discussion. Check there for sample discussion questions.