**Essential Questions**

*…Are questions that are central to our lives, and they help to define what it means to be human. Essential Questions address deeper issues that have a variety of viewpoints, and defy one simple answer.*



**The Characteristics of the Essential Question**

* A good essential question is open-ended, non-judgemental, meaningful and purposeful.
* A good essential question often has an emotive force.
* A good essential question centers around major psychological, ethical, or moral issues.
* A good essential question addresses the human condition.
* A good essential question probes for deeper meaning.
* A good essential question fosters the development of higher order capabilities such as problem-solving.

**Essential Questions develop foundational understandings. They provide the fundamental organizing principles that bound an inquiry and guide the development of meaningful, authentic tasks. Essential questions have several key components:**

* Essential questions are so compelling that people have raised them in many different ways. For example, the question “What is light?” has scientific, mathematical, aesthetic, literary and spiritual dimensions.
* An essential question is always poised at the boundary of the known and the unknown.
* Engages the imagination in significant ways. People can only know a limited amount about the world through direct experience. We are most intrigued, puzzled and enchanted by experience that comes to us imaginatively. Without imagination, we could not ask the questions that drive science forward. We would have no art, no stories, no mathematics, no philosophy. Moreover, it is questions that spark of the imagination that permits young and old to journey together into unknown realms. Imagination knows no bounds, no restrictions.

**The most significant thoughts during our lives will center on**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

* How do individuals develop values and beliefs?
* When should an individual take a stand in opposition to an individual or larger group?
* When is it appropriate to change the beliefs or values of society?
* What role or purpose does religion/spirituality serve in a culture?
* How do our values and beliefs shape who we are as individuals and influence our behaviour?
* What tools can the individual use to judge the difference, or draw a line between, illusion and reality?
* What is the function of human will in relationships between good and evil?
* Does love require sacrifice?
* What is the relationship between love and trust or between love and loyalty?
* What can you learn about yourself by studying the lives of others?
* How does what others think about you affect how you think about yourself?
* What turning points determine our individual pathways to adulthood?
* In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?
* What are the responsibilities of the individual and/or society in regard to the health of the environment?
* What is the relationship between decisions and consequences?
* How do we know how to make good decisions?
* How can a person’s decisions and actions change his/her life?
* How do the decisions and actions of a character’s reveal their personalities?
* How do decisions, actions, and consequences vary depending on the different perspectives of the people involved?
* How do we know what we know?
* How does what we know about the world shape the way we view ourselves?
* What does it mean to be an “insider” or an “outsider?”
* What does it mean to “grow up”?
* Do you believe that things are fated no matter what, or do you believe your actions can change the course of your life?
* Have the forces of good and evil changed over time?
* How can you use language to empower yourself?
* How is language used to manipulate us?
* In what ways are language and power inseparable?
* Is it possible to have culture without language?
* Is it possible to think without language?
* How does conflict lead to change?
* What problem-solving strategies can individuals use to manage conflict and change?
* How does an individual’s point of view affect the way they deal with conflict?
* What personal qualities have helped you to deal with conflict and change?
* How might it feel to live through a conflict that disrupts your way of life?
* How does conflict influence an individual’s decisions and actions?
* How are people transformed through their relationships with others?
* What is community and what are the individual’s responsibilities to the community as well as the community’s responsibilities to the individual?
* In the face of adversity, what causes some people to prevail while others fail?
* What is the meaning of life and does that shape our beliefs regarding death?
* Are we governed/guided by fate, free will, a greater power, or do we fall somewhere on the spectrum between?

**Some of the universal truths Essential Questions focus on are:**

**Life – Death - Free Will - Fate - Purpose - Truth - Identity - Faith - Love - Companionship - Betrayal - Forgiveness - Redemption - Isolation - Choice - Integrity - Courage - Temptation - Leadership - Addiction - Obsession - Fortitude - Invention - Inspiration - Wisdom - Honour**

The greatest texts (novels, plays, poetry, film, music and visual art) all deal with ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS in some manner, if they did not, these texts would not be considered truly great.

To access some of the ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS in a text, ask “What are some of the BIG questions this author is showing about life through this text?” Also, correlate the “universal truths” list to what you are reading. One of them should jump out at you. By using this thought pattern you will create superior ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS.