

Creative Questions

A routine for generating and transforming questions.

1. Pick an everyday object or topic and brainstorm a list of questions about it.
2. Look over the list and transform some of the questions into questions that challenge the imagination. Do this by transforming questions along the lines of:
 - What would it be like if...
 - How would it be different if...
 - What would change if...
 - How would it look differently if...
 - Suppose that...
3. Choose a question to imaginatively explore. Explore it by imaginatively playing out its possibilities. Do this by:
 - Writing a story or essay
 - Drawing a picture
 - Creating a play or dialogue
 - Inventing a scenario
 - Conducting an imaginary interview
 - Conducting a thought experiment
4. Reflect: What new ideas do you have about the topic, concept, or object that you didn't have before?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

Formulating and exploring an interesting question is often as important as finding a solution. This routine encourages students to create interesting questions and then imaginatively mess around with them for a while in order to explore their creative possibilities. It provides students with the opportunity to practice developing good questions that provoke thinking and inquiry into a topic.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

Use Creative Questions to expand and deepen students' thinking, to encourage students' curiosity and to increase students' motivation to inquire. This routine can be used when you are introducing a new topic to help students get a sense of its breadth. It can be used when you're in the middle of studying a topic as a way of enlivening students' curiosity. And it can be used when you are near the end of studying a topic to show students how the knowledge they have gained about the topic helps them to ask ever more interesting questions. This routine can also be used continuously throughout a topic to help the class keep a visible, evolving list of questions about the topic that can be added to at anytime.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Before using Creative Questions you might want to ask students what they think makes a good question. Then, when you show the Creative Questions, explain that this routine is a tool for asking good questions.

Start the routine by providing a topic, concept, or object—a painting, voting rights, a stethoscope, genetic engineering. Ask them to use the Creative Questions to generate a list of questions about the topic or object. Initially, it's best to work together as an entire group. Once students get the hang of the routine, you can have them work in small groups or even solo. After students finish generating questions, ask them to pick one of the questions to investigate further.

Encourage students to explore it by imaginatively playing out its possibilities. Writing a story or essay, drawing a picture, creating a play or dialogue, inventing a scenario, conducting an imaginary interview, or conducting a thought experiment are just some of the possible ways for students to find out about their questions. At the end of the exploration process, be sure to take time to reflect on new insights and ideas about the topic, object, or concept.

This thinking routine was developed as part of the Visible Thinking project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.