

# QUESTIONING



**Assessing and Developing Children's  
Understanding and Thinking in Literacy  
through Effective Questioning**



## **Introduction**

This document has been produced to support the development of effective questioning and dialogue between teacher and pupils.

The ideas contained within this document will give practical support in developing the skill of questioning.

It will help teachers by:

- Identifying a range of different questions that may be asked and used to assess children's understanding and thinking
- Providing an analysis of the range of questions that teachers use

Questions are an essential feature of formative assessment as they enable child and teacher to identify what they know and can guide them in their next steps.

## Four types of questions

|                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>CLOSED</b></p> <p>A closed question implies that the teacher has a predetermined 'correct' response in mind</p>                                        | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPEN</b></p> <p>An open question permits a range of responses</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LITERAL</b></p> <p>Literal questions are concerned with the recall of facts or simple comprehension where the answer is clearly stated in the text</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>HIGHER ORDER</b></p> <p>Higher order questions make progressive cognitive demand on children. They encourage children to think beyond the literal.</p> <p>The effective use of higher order questions enables teachers to assess children's understanding and thinking</p> |

It is important that there should be an appropriate balance of literal and higher order questions for children in all age groups.

# Assessment Focus for Reading

|     |                                                                                                                                  |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AF1 | Use a range of strategies including accurate decoding of text, to read for meaning                                               |
| AF2 | Understand, describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to text         |
| AF3 | Deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from texts                                                               |
| AF4 | Identify and comment on the structure and organisation of texts, including grammatical and presentational features at text level |
| AF5 | Explain and comment on writers' uses of language, including grammatical and literary features at word and sentence level         |
| AF6 | Identify and comment on writers' purposes and viewpoints and the overall effect of the text on the reader                        |
| AF7 | Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions                                           |

## **Points to remember when using the Reading AFs**

- AFs are not hierarchical, age or ability related, and they define broad areas in which evidence can be examined in order to determine how well pupils are progressing
- Readers use a range of strategies to decode texts (AF1) which become more automatic with experience, as listening to pupils read throughout Key Stage 2 demonstrates
- Reading involves making meaning from content, structure and language (AFs 2-5)
- To develop as readers who can make sense of a wide range of texts, pupils need to be secure on AF3. Securing AF3 is a vital underpinning for progress through level 4 and above
- The AFs which highlight evaluation and analysis (AFs 4-7) build on the skills in AFs 1-3
- In exploring a text, readers respond to specific aspects (AFs 4-5) and to the text as a whole (AF6)

# **Types of questions**

## **Recall**

*recalling or revising material that has already been covered*

## **Comprehension**

*understanding the main points of a story*

## **Application**

*transferring knowledge learned in one context to another*

## **Analytical**

*analysing mood, setting, characters, expressing opinions and preferences, make inference and deduction, refer to text*

## **Synthesis**

*developing a critical stance based on information from a range of sources*

## **Evaluation**

*making judgements, explaining reasons for judgements, comparing and contrasting, developing reasoning using evidence*

# Examples of Literal Questions

## Literal Retrieval Questions (AF2)

### Reading AF2

#### To develop performance in AF2 children need to:

Understand, describe, select or retrieve info, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to the text.

#### This can be achieved by:

- Encouraging children to **describe, retell** and **locate**
- Modelling the above, making references to, and quoting from, the text
- Asking recall and simple comprehension questions during Shared and Guided Reading

### Recall Questions

– These questions will help children recall or revise material they have previously read.

- Where does the story take place?
- When did the story take place?
- What did s/he/it look like?
- Who was s/he/it?
- Where did s/he/it live?
- Who are the key characters in the book?
- Where in the book would you find ...?

### Comprehension Questions

*Children show an understanding of the main points of a story.*

- They describe what they know
- They give examples, summarise or outline key basic points in their own words
- They link stories with personal experience

- Describe ..., e.g. the giant
- What do you think is happening here?
- What happened in the story?
- What might this mean? e.g. proudly
- Through whose eyes is the story told?
- Which part of the story best describes the setting?
- Which words/phrases tell you that ... e.g. the setting is spooky
- Which part tells you ..., e.g. they were annoyed that Goldilocks was in their house
- Why do ...? e.g. why do people need to look after their teeth?

# Examples of Higher Order Questions

## Higher Order Questions (AF3, AF4, AF5, AF6, AF7)

### **Reading AF3**

#### **To develop performance in AF3 children need to:**

Deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas.

#### **This can be achieved by:**

- Encouraging children to compare, contrast and infer
- Modelling the above by making reference to, and quoting from, the text
- Asking analytical and synthesis questions

### **Reading AF4**

#### **To develop performance in AF4 children need to:**

Identify and comment on structure and organisation of texts.

#### **This can be achieved by:**

- Making very explicit links between reading and writing – especially the ways in which texts are organised
- Modelling the language needed to comment upon authors' use of structure, organisation, grammar and presentation
- Using genre checklists to highlight the layout features and language features of different texts
- Asking analytical questions and questions requiring synthesis. During shared and guided reading sessions focus on aspects of structure and organisation, e.g. paragraph labels, navigational features such as sub-headings, titles, etc
- Using structural organisers, e.g. story maps, charts, etc

### **Reading AF5**

#### **To develop performance in AF5 children need to:**

Explain and comment on writer's use of language, including grammatical and presentational features at text level.

#### **This can be achieved by:**

- Modelling and use prompts to explore the author's intention, e.g. *'it makes me imagine ...'*
- Asking analytical questions
- Planning activities to encourage children to use strategies, e.g. using a reading journal
- Collecting and commenting upon imagery

### **Reading AF6**

#### **To develop performance in AF6 children need to:**

Identify and comment on writers' purpose and viewpoints and the overall effect of the text on the reader.

#### **This can be achieved by:**

- Including **Purpose** of text type on genre checklist
- Asking application, analytical, synthesis and evaluation questions, encouraging children to elaborate on their responses, following the teacher's example

### **Reading AF7**

#### **To develop performance in AF7 children need to:**

Relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions.

#### **This can be achieved by:**

- Asking questions that require children to call upon their knowledge of traditional stories to link ideas between texts
- Encouraging children to link popular culture and stereotypes to characters and themes in their reading
- Using knowledge of history and 'outdated' beliefs and attitudes to comment upon texts
- Asking questions to encourage children to apply their knowledge and understanding of life

## **Application Questions**

- Application means that the information learned can be applied in different contexts
  - Application questions require children to transfer knowledge learned in one context to another
  - Application questions require children to make links with other stories
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- Do you know any other story which has a similar theme, e.g. good over evil, weak over strong, wise over foolish?
  - Can you think of another story which deals with the same issues, e.g. social, cultural, moral, issues?
  - Can you think of another author who handles time in this way? e.g. flashbacks, dreams
  - Which stories have openings like this?

## **Analytical Questions**

- Analytical questions require children to build on existing knowledge
  - Analytical questions require children to identify implicit meanings, make inference and deduction and become aware of the author's intentions
  - Analytical questions ask children to demonstrate understanding of significant themes, ideas, events and characters and refer to the text when explaining views
  - Analytical questions ask children to analyse mood, setting and characters, style, structure and other significant aspects
  - Analytical questions encourage children to express opinions and preferences about major events or ideas in stories or poems
  - Analytical questions ask children to refer to the text when explaining views; use of direct quotes may support their view
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- How does the layout help ...? e.g. paragraphs, sub-headings, font
  - Why are words misspelt in this comic?
  - What makes you think that?
  - What words give you that impression?
  - How did ...? e.g. the ostler betray Bess and the Highwayman?
  - Can you explain why?
  - Do you agree with ...'s opinion?
  - I wonder what the writer intended?
  - Explain why the writer has decided to ...?
  - I wonder what was in the author's mind here?
  - What do you think these words mean and why do you think the writer chose them?
  - How has the author used, e.g. adjectives, to make this character funny?
  - Why do you think the author chose this setting?
  - What evidence is there to support your view?
  - Does this remind you of any other books you have read and how? e.g. story structure, settings, images, layout, character
  - Why did ...? e.g. the boy slam the door when he left the room?
  - What does the word, e.g. slam, imply?
  - How did the character react to ...?
  - How do the pictures help you to understand, e.g. the behaviour of the characters?
  - Was this text trying to ...? e.g. persuade you to watch the film?
  - Does the author like ...? How do you know?
  - How were the purposes of the texts different?
  - What can you tell about the viewpoint of the author?
  - Could ... be described as ...? e.g. could 'Malfoy' be described as a 'bully'?

### Questions requiring synthesis

- Synthesis questions ask children to take an idea from one context and reapply it in a different context.
- Synthesis questions encourage children to restructure text:
  - Rewriting a narrative as a diary;
  - Discussing a familiar story and changing elements;
  - Changing an explanatory text into a diagram.
- Synthesis questions ask children to develop a critical stance
- Synthesis questions encourage children to retrieve and collate information from a range of sources and can lead to the construction of an argument, an opinion, or making predictions
- Synthesis questions ask children to select sentences, phrases and relevant information to support their views.

- What ideas are we given about ...? e.g. impact of weather
- What does the author think about ...? e.g. looking after the countryside
- What is your opinion? What evidence do you have to support your view?
- Using evidence from the text can you tell me what you feel about ...?
- Based on what you have read, what do you think about, e.g. global warming?
- What would this character think about ...? (possibly a present day issue)
- Look at the descriptions of 3 people. Who is most likely to buy this book?
- In what kind of magazine would you expect to find an article like this?
- Why were ...? e.g. the quotations included
- In what ways is ... like ...? e.g. Pingu like a toddler
- Which of the features of a star footballer could an ordinary person have?
- Give two pieces of evidence that this is a modern/old/multicultural story?
- How did you know ...? e.g. The story began "Once upon a time". How did you know there was likely to be a happy ending?
- What is it about ... that tells you ...? e.g. what is it about the language choice that tells you it was written a long time ago?
- What else might make ... the character sad/angry/frustrated etc?
- What other reason could there be for ...? e.g. the school being deserted?

### Evaluation questions

- Evaluation questions require children to make judgements about what they have analysed and explain the reasons for those judgements
  - Evaluation questions encourage children to compare and contrast
  - Evaluation questions require children to interrogate and evaluate the text
  - Evaluation questions require the use of evidence and reasoning
- What makes this a successful text? What evidence do you have to justify your opinion?
  - Does it work?
  - Could it be better? Is it as good as ...?
  - Which is better and why?
  - Which text do you think is more/most effective?
  - Which text is giving the writer's own opinion? How do you know?

# Strategies for developing effective dialogue

These can be used alongside effective questioning techniques to assess and develop children's thinking and understanding in literacy.

## **Invite pupils to elaborate**

Encourages pupils to develop more complex contributions

*'Say a little more about that ...'*

## **Echo**

Helps pupils clarify their own thinking, and shows they have been listened to

*'So you think that ...'*

## **Non-verbal invitations**

Can signal to individuals to contribute or leave very open – a versatile response

*Eye contact, tilt of head, nod, etc ...*

## **Make a personal contribution from your own experience**

Encourages pupils to offer contributions of their own, and see identification and empathy as useful tools

*'I remember ...'*

## **Clarify ideas**

Makes the key points easier to grasp, and encourages children to consider viewpoints

*'I can tell that is the case because ...'*

## **Make a suggestion**

Encourages pupils to offer their own suggestions or build on teacher's suggestion

*'You could try ...'*

## **Reflect on topics**

Encourages pupils to explore the topic rather than seeking a single answer

*'Yes, I sometimes think that ...'*

## **Offer information or make observations on a topic**

Encourages pupils to offer their own information and discuss the adult's contribution

*'It might be useful to know that ...'*

## **Speculate on a given subject**

Encourages pupils to explore ideas, and understand that uncertainty is a normal stage in the thinking process

Further information regarding developing effective dialogue can be found on:

[www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primaryframework/assessment/dafl/lt/qd](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primaryframework/assessment/dafl/lt/qd)