



## QUESTIONING

Thinking  
strategies  
to enhance skills  
of analysis,  
creativity,  
and problem  
solving.

**GO FOR THE GOLD**

**Brief Description of the Lesson:** Students review the basics of writing good discussion questions (complex open-ended questions rather than simple yes/no or short answer questions) and practice composing good questions in a teacher led discussion. To evaluate their questioning skills, the students write six discussion questions after reading “The Discovery of Gold in California,” John Sutter’s first-hand account of the California Gold Rush. As a follow up, the students’ discussion questions can be used in Socratic Seminar, or they can exchange papers with a partner and share their responses in writing.

**SOL/POS Objective:** (*List number and specific objective*)

**English 6.5**

The student develops an appreciation for literature through a variety of experiences with a wide range of genres.

**English 6.6**

The student develops the use of specified critical reading skills to think about and respond to the ideas in what is read, written or heard.

**Instructional Strategy:**

Cues, Questions, and Advance Organizers- Students develop quality questions to discuss literature read.

**Materials:** 6th grade history textbook, “Question Grid,” and “Checklist for Good Discussion Questions.”

Student access to Sutter’s article “The Discovery of Gold in California” – available at the website <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist2/gold.html>, 6th gr. history textbook

**Enduring Understandings:**

- Asking questions creates opportunities for people to express their ideas and opinions.
- Open-ended questions spark meaningful discussions.
- Personal accounts are an important resource for learning about the past.

**Introduction/Essential Questions:** (For example, *What influences your reaction to an issue or a problem?*)

- What are the characteristics of good discussion questions?
- What are the three types of questions typically used in discussions such as Socratic Seminar?
- Why do open-ended questions spark good discussion?
- From John Sutter’s point of view, what was it like to experience the California Gold Rush?

**Teach and Explore Strategy:** (Steps in teaching the process and exploring applications) Prior to teaching this lesson, be sure to have taught or reviewed the introductory thinking process lesson. Help focus students’ thinking by reminding them of the metacognitive component of this lesson.



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- Explain that in this lesson students will switch roles with the teacher and become question writers. To do this they need to be able to compose good discussion questions.
- Review the difference between simple and complex questions. Ask students to define an open-ended question. Ask why open-ended questions are better than closed questions for discussion.
- Refer to the “Question Grid” handout and ask students to identify the questions on the grid that are best for creating open-ended questions. (For example, “When did” is not open-ended and “How might” is open-ended.) Have students recall a familiar story like “Little Red Riding Hood”, or a story read in class and ask them give examples of good discussion questions.
- Ask students what characteristics might be on a checklist for good discussion questions. Hand out the “Checklist for Good Discussion Questions” and have them add any new ideas not on the list.
- Mention that these resources (Question Grid and Question Checklist) will help them as they write their six good discussion questions. The questions will relate to a first hand account of an event mentioned in their history texts that had an impact on movement to the West during the mid 1800’s –The California Gold Rush. Review this event by having them read from the history text, *America’s Story*, pg. 365 (or *Why We Remember* pp.397-98) and/or share what they already know about it. Tell students that this kind of information about the Gold Rush is from a secondary source.
- Introduce John Sutter’s article, “The Discovery of Gold in California” and explain that it is a primary source of information because it is a personal account written by John Sutter. His article about the Gold Rush was published in *Hutchings’ California Magazine, November 1857*.
- Give students time to read “*The Discovery of Gold in California*” silently or quietly with a partner (approx. 20 minutes). If they are not finished reading within a reasonable amount of time, have them write questions for the part which they read.
- After reading, students write six discussion questions.
- Students evaluate the quality of their questions by asking themselves if their questions meet the following good discussion question criteria.
- **OPTIONAL** : Students could be directed to answer their own questions and compare their responses to those of other students during discussion time.

**Assessment Evidence:** (Discussion, teacher observation, completed product, student reflection...)

- Student discussion
- Teacher observation
- Final Product : Six discussion questions (Consider to what extent the questions meet the criteria for good discussion questions)

**Metacognition:** (Discuss thinking involved and applications for using the strategy)

- Why is being able to write or ask good questions important?
- In what other circumstances could the thinking process of questioning be useful?
- How have you improved in your ability to write questions?



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**Extension:**

- Have students circle their best three questions and have then submit them as discussion questions to be used in a Socratic Seminar for Sutter’s “The Discovery of Gold in California.”
- Students can trade questions with another student and write responses to their questions.



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**CHECKLIST FOR GOOD DISCUSSION QUESTION**

1. Are my questions open-ended? (have more than one right answer)
2. Do the questions examine ideas, concepts, values, beliefs, rather than just the facts?
3. If there are yes/no or short answer questions, do they have follow up questions requiring more detail or explanation?
4. Do the questions connect to enough evidence in the reading to support multiple answer and points of view?
5. Do the questions interest you? (If interesting to you, others will probably want to answer your questions)

# Question Grid



	1	2	3	4	5	6	
<b>A</b>	What Is?	Where Is?	When Is?	Who Is?	Why Is?	How Is?	<b>IS</b>
<b>B</b>	What Did?	Where Did?	When Did?	Who Did?	Why Did?	How Did?	<b>DID</b>
<b>C</b>	What Can?	Where Can?	When Can?	Who Can?	Why Can?	How Can?	<b>CAN</b>
<b>D</b>	What Would?	Where would?	When Would?	Who Would?	Why Would?	How Would?	<b>WOULD</b>
<b>E</b>	What Will?	Where Will?	When Will?	Who Will?	Why Will?	How Will?	<b>WILL</b>
<b>F</b>	What Might?	Where Might?	When Might?	Who Might?	Why Might?	How Might?	<b>MIGHT</b>
	<b>WHAT</b>	<b>WHERE</b>	<b>WHEN</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>WHY</b>	<b>HOW</b>	