



Question-Flooding a Topic

Duration: 15-20 minutes | **Overview:** Students will develop a list of questions about their topic, narrowing it down to questions they are most interested in, and answering those questions to draft working claims.

Materials:

- Strategy slides with sentence stems
- Student notebooks or paper for writing

Steps:

Before the Activity:

1. Remind students of the topic you are currently studying.
2. Reassure students that good ideas don't come from nowhere, and that often our first idea isn't our best idea. So, today they will be practicing a strategy to help them find a bunch of ideas that could ultimately be developed into an interesting claim about the class's current topic of study.

During the Activity:

1. Ask students to write the topic at the top of a piece of paper or in the center of a mind map.
2. Then, set a timer for 5-7 minutes (this will feel like a long time!), and ask students to write down as many open-ended questions as they can about that topic.

You can project these sentence stems to help them develop meaningful questions.

How has _____ impacted _____?

How does _____ affect me?

What is the meaning behind _____?

How has _____ changed over time?

How is _____ related to _____?

How does _____ do _____?

Why does _____ work this way?



Why does _____ have this effect?
What is the relationship between _____ and _____?
How does _____ compare to _____?
What is the relationship between _____ and _____?
What is the significance of _____?
What would happen if _____ didn't exist / hadn't happened?
What assumptions does _____ rely on?
How does _____ compare to _____?
What problem does _____ solve, and does it actually solve it?
Who benefits from _____, and who doesn't?
What is the cost of _____?
Under what conditions does _____ succeed or fail?
What does _____ reveal about _____ (a person, a group, a time period)?

3. When time is up, students should look at the questions they have written, and circle the 2-4 that are most interesting to them.
4. In the margins, students should write down an answer to those questions. Now they have drafts of working claims!

After the Activity:

This activity can be enough on its own! You can conclude by telling students that they can come back to this strategy any time they need to develop a claim about a topic.

If you want to take this activity further, here are a few ideas for extending this work:

- Students can choose among those draft claims, selecting the one they like best to work with for a project or essay.
- Students can workshop their draft claims with a partner to polish one of them.
- Students can post one draft claim to Padlet to receive anonymous feedback from peers.

Examples of Question-Flooding a Topic to Find a Claim

Example using Prohibition

Question-Flood:



- Why did Prohibition happen in the 1920s?
- Who benefits from Prohibition? And who doesn't?
- What conditions made Prohibition possible?
- What tradeoffs did Prohibition require?
- What problems does Prohibition address? And does it actually solve them?
- Does Prohibition affect us today?
- How has public perception and memory of Prohibition changed over time?
- How is Prohibition related to women's suffrage?
- What does Prohibition reveal about the limits of the law to enforce morality?
- What was the true cost of Prohibition?

Choose 2-3 most interesting questions.

Answer each.

Select your favorite as a draft claim.

Example using *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

Question-Flood:

- Why does the boys' social order collapse gradually rather than immediately?
- Who benefits from the group's shift toward Jack's leadership, and who doesn't?
- What assumptions does the boys' early democratic system rely on?
- What does Piggy's treatment reveal about how the group defines value?
- Whose perspective is missing from the boys' account of what happens on the island?
- Was the group's descent into violence inevitable, or could different choices have changed the outcome?
- What tradeoffs did the group make in choosing Jack's leadership over Ralph's?
- What is the significance of the novel ending with an adult rescuer?

Choose 2-3 most interesting questions.



Answer each.

Select your favorite as a draft claim.

Purpose-Driven Inquiry

Purpose-Driven Questioning helps you draft strong inquiry questions by clarifying what you want to understand before worrying about how to phrase a question. Use this chart to name your learning goal, then match it with question stems that will help you ask a clear, meaningful inquiry question.

If you think of other types of information that would be useful for you or your classmates to explore that aren't included here, simply identify what you want to discover/understand and draft question formats that will help you attain that information.

What you're trying to find out	Potential question format
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Cause	What actions/events caused ____?
Effect	What were the results of ____?
Motive	Why did ____ do ____?
Connections	How does ____ inform our understanding of ____?
Details to provide explanations	What was the date/location/names of people/things involved? And how does this information explain ____?
Details to provide context for an event within a larger historical topic	What was the date/location/names of people/things involved? And how does this information about ____ affect ____?
Details to support an argument	What was the date/location/names of people/things involved? And how does this information corroborate or combat my thesis?
People/groups' opinions	How did ____ feel about ____? Why did ____ consider ____ positive/negative/ambivalent?
<i>[The information you want]</i>	<i>[The question format]</i>