

Some of the Best Questions Are Ones that Cannot Be Answered

Description: Often in school, students are presented with questions that they are expected to find a correct answer to. This could be a math problem, how to spell a word, the name of a figure, event, or date in history, or how sounds waves work. In life however, sometimes there is no easy answer, and there are even times when there is no answer. How do we cope with these unanswered questions? And why do we ponder them when we know there is the likelihood that they will never be answered?



Depth and Complexity icons: Unanswered questions

Secondary Depth and Complexity icons:

- Ethics
- Multiple perspectives
- Details
- Over time
- Big ideas

Product: Students will film a video confessional where they attempt their best to answer an unanswered question from multiple perspectives. This can be done on Flip, WeVideo, or just shot on their phone.

Skills: research
public speaking
communication
technology
critical thinking

Calendar:

Is there such a thing as an unanswered question?		What is a rhetorical question?	What are philosophical questions?	
What are unanswered questions that you wonder about?		What question do you want to explore?	Prepare your video testimonial	
Prepare your video testimonial		Film your video testimonial	Share your video testimonial	

Lesson –is there such a thing as an unanswered question?

Give students pre-assessment

Name: _____

Answer the following 10 questions

1. Why do noses run and feet smell?
2. What is the color of a mirror?
3. Why is vanilla ice cream white when the vanilla bean is brown?
4. Is there life on other planets?
5. If everyone agrees that war is bad, why don't we just stop fighting?
6. If Cinderella's shoe fit perfectly, then why did it fall off?
7. When you call an orange and orange, are you describing the fruit or the color?
8. Why do we cook bacon and bake cookies?
9. Why do people have to die?
10. Is the answer to this question no?

- Go over some of the answers students come up with.
- Ask them why they don't have answers for most if not all of them.
- Pose this question: Are there times when a question doesn't have an answer?

Possible answers

- When it is based on opinion.
- When no one has experienced it.
- When the person asking the question doesn't expect an answer.
- When it cannot be explained scientifically.
- When it has not been discovered.
- When we don't know we don't know it.

These are known as unanswered questions. Sometimes we have unanswered questions that can be answered if we do a little research. Other times there is simply not an answer for it no matter how hard we study and research it.



Questions to consider:

What has not been explored, proven, or understood about this topic?

How is the information incomplete in its explanation?

What conclusions need further evidence?

Student Activity

- Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

Ask students to make an argument for both sides.

Example argument for the egg:

The egg came first because without the egg, there is no way for the chicken to hatch unless it begins as an egg.

Example argument for the chicken:

The chicken came first because something had to lay the egg in the first place. It cannot just suddenly appear.

Digging Deeper – Question to pose to the class as a bell ender

- Not every question has an answer, but does every answer have a question?

Lesson – What is a rhetorical question?

Watch the first 6 minutes of the following video on rhetorical questions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=91YJhmkF0Jc>

What is a rhetorical question?

- A question for which the person asking it does not expect an answer. The question is posed to get the person thinking.

Other examples of rhetorical questions:

- Do you want to be a failure for the rest of your life?
- Can fish swim?
- Is the sky blue?
- Is water wet?
- Don't you care about me?
- Who do you think you are?
- What is wrong with society today?

A rhetorical question can be used to make a positive point:

- What's not to like?
(It's like saying "I like it", which is a statement.)
- Who doesn't love pizza?
("I love pizza.")
- Wow, who knew?
("This is surprisingly good.")

A rhetorical question can be used to make a negative point:

- Does it look like I'm bothered?
("I'm not bothered.")
- What is the matter with kids today?
("Kids today have issues")
- What have the Romans ever done for us?
("The Romans have done nothing for us.")

There actually used to be a rhetorical question mark which they created in the 1500s so that people knew when the questions was not to be answered.



Activity – Student rhetorical questions

Have the students try their hand at writing their own rhetorical questions.

At the end of class have them share some of their questions.

CREATE YOUR OWN RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

WRITE YOUR OWN RHETORICAL QUESTIONS FOR THE SITUATIONS PROVIDED.

NAME _____

We need to stop global warming before it is too late.	
Your mom has said something to you that is so obvious.	
Some kids are misbehaving in class.	
This is the best school ever.	
It is taking forever to get your order at the fast food place.	
You should visit the Grand Canyon.	
Schools need to teach worthwhile skills such as being a good citizen.	
You should go swimming when it is 30 degrees out.	
No one would think that vegetables are better tasting than pizza.	

Digging Deeper – Question to pose to the class as a bell ender

What is a rhetorical question you could ask about yourself?

Lesson – What are philosophical questions?

Some questions have no answer because it is not concrete in nature but rather philosophical. There is no way to test the answer to see if it is correct.

Philosophical Questions (Digging a Little Deeper)

Name _____

Choose one of the following philosophical questions. Explore the various perspectives and how they might respond to the question.

- If a tree falls in the woods and no one is around, does it make a sound?
- What is the sound of one hand clapping?
- What would happen if we lived forever?
- Can we choose our emotions or do they just happen?
- What makes us human?
- What is beauty?
- Is ignorance bliss?
- What is fair?
- If we had a 1000 years to live, would we learn everything?
- How do you know you are not dreaming right now?

Perspective #1 possible response:

Perspective #2 possible response:

Dig a Little Deeper and Think about Perspective #3 possible response

Dig Even Deeper and Think about Perspective #4 possible response

Question to pose to the class as a bell ender

If someone says “I am lying”, is this a true statement or a false one?

Activity – What are unanswered questions that you are curious about?

If you could have any 5 unanswered questions answered, what would they be?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Which of these intrigues you the most?

What has not been explored, proven, or understood about this topic?

How is the information incomplete in its explanation?

What conclusions need further evidence?

What are the different perspectives on this question?

Activity – What question do you want to explore?

Students are to take one unanswered question and investigate multiple sides of the possible answer.

They will film this debate as a testimonial where they spend 5 minutes answering the question from as many perspectives as possible but the entire 5 minutes must be used. Evidence should be considered as well.

Students can use WeVideo, Flip, or some other program/device to record the testimonial. These testimonials will be shared on the final day of the project.

If students are having trouble, here are examples of unanswered questions they might consider.

Should you be rewarded for your efforts in school?

Is it more important to be rich or to be happy?

What is the best flavor of ice cream?

Do we control technology or does technology control us?

Is the impossible ever possible?

Can you doubt that you exist?

Does the universe go on forever?

Do we have a soul?

Do you perceive things as they are or as you want them to be?

Do things happen by chance or is everything predetermined?

Does time exist or did we create it?

Are unicorns (or any mythical creature) real?

If many people believe that something is true, does that make it true?

Do two wrongs make a right?

Example testimonial:

Which is better; paper or plastic bags?

Perspective #1: Paper bags

I believe that paper is better than plastic for several reasons. First off, paper is biodegradable meaning it breaks down if put in a landfill. A plastic bag is going to take thousands of years to decompose so it is bad for the environment. Second, paper bags are safer. Plastic bags can become trapped over a person or an animal's head and cause it to suffocate. This is not going to happen with a paper bag. Third, paper bags have other uses too such as for crafts and such creative things. Plastic bags can only be used for things like picking up dog poop which isn't that creative. A counterargument that might be used is that paper bags are more expensive to produce than plastic ones. But, you cannot put a price on the environment though so even if paper bags costs more it is well worth the money if it helps.

Perspective #2: Plastic bags

I believe that plastic is better than paper bags. One reason is the durability. You can use and reuse a plastic bag many times. A paper bag falls apart after usually a single use, especially if it gets wet. Plastic bags can get wet and still remains strong so it can contain leaks that might happen. A second reason why plastic is better is that they are easier to carry than paper ones. With the handles on the plastic bags you can hold several in one hand, while it takes both hands to carry one paper bag. A third reason would be that plastic bags are cheaper to make. On average they cost about a penny per bag while a paper bag costs 5 cents. This means because grocery stores have to pay less for plastic bags, they can lower their prices on products in the store, passing the savings on to you. One counterargument is that plastic bags are bad for the environment. Although paper bags are biodegradable, it takes four times as much energy to produce a paper bag as opposed to a plastic one. Not only that, paper bags come from trees which are a reason for the rainforests being cut down.

Perspective #3: Cotton bags

I think that neither is a great option. Plastic and paper bags are both bad for the environment. Paper bags require trees to be cut down while plastic bags are produced using petroleum. Cotton bags on the other hand come from the environment and you can always plant more cotton which will grow faster than a tree. If a cotton bag gets dirty, you can simply wash it. You cannot wash a paper bag without ruining it and drying a plastic bag can be tricky. Finally, cotton bags are stronger than the other two types of bags and can be used many times before breaking down. Plus cotton bags have the benefits of both plastic and paper bags. Cotton bags are larger and can hold more groceries, but it has a handle attached to it which makes it easier to carry. There will be some who would argue that taking the cotton bags with you to the store is much more inconvenient than simply using the paper or plastic bags that are already there. But again, if we

are helping the environment it is well worth any hassle and once you get used to doing it, it will become a habit.

Example of a filmed testimonial:

<https://youtu.be/susplh1Sh8c>

Testimonial Script

Perspective #1:

Assertion:

Reasoning:

Evidence:

Perspective #2

Assertion:

Reasoning:

Evidence:

Perspective #3 (if there is one)

Assertion:

Reasoning:

Evidence:

Perspective #4 (if there is one)

Assertion:

Reasoning:

Evidence: