

# Let Them Write! Creating and Answering Text-Dependent Questions in the Primary Grades

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*Abstract:* Russell provides strategies for constructing text-dependent questions and for assisting students when answering these questions.

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Preparing students to become avid readers and writers is something a teacher can not only dream of, but foresee happening right in the classroom. As a third grade teacher, I saw my students transform from robotic readers and writers into critical thinkers who read with purpose and expressed their thoughts on paper. After providing my students with engaging text, posing high-level questions about the text, and requiring them to voice their opinions, they were able to become both readers who built stamina and proficient writers who answered text-dependent questions, those that “focus on information that can be found explicitly and directly in the text” (Boelé, 2016, p. 218).

Answering questions with careful attention to the text in order to construct meaning is a practice discussed in schools across the U.S. According to much of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), instructional strategies that support textual analysis benefit all students, for paying close attention to the information presented in the text allows readers to answer text-dependent questions.

The progression of text-dependent questions depends on four phases (Fisher, Frey, Anderson, & Thayre, 2015):

1. *Literal* text-dependent questions involve key details and key understandings (What does the text say?);

2. *Structural* text-dependent questions focus on authorial craft and purpose, vocabulary, and structure (How does the text work?);
3. *Inferential* text-dependent questions include making inferences, stating opinions/arguments, and making intertextual connections (What does the text mean?);
4. *Interpretive* text-dependent questions refer to inspirational effects (What does the text inspire you to do?)

Students focus on deeper meaning when they make inferences, interpret the text, and focus on what is not explicitly stated in the text (Boelé, 2016; Fischer, Frey, & Hattie, 2016).

In this article, I will provide strategies for developing text-dependent questions and for assisting students when answering these questions. Developing text-dependent questions and applying a constructed-response strategy to answer these questions was a common instructional practice in my third-grade classroom and may also benefit middle school students.

### **Creating Text-Dependent Questions**

When creating text-dependent questions, again consider the four phases detailed above by following three steps. First, when creating a *literal* question, ensure that students understand the key ideas or themes of the text. Students may need to engage in discussions around the character, setting, events, and other central ideas. Second, when creating a *structural* question, teach vocabulary and structural elements such as use of punctuation, headings and subheadings, and complementary illustrations, all essential to understanding the meaning of the text. Third, evaluate the question using the following criteria:

1. requires the student to read the text;
2. gives an opportunity to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary;
3. allows students to make inferences from the text;
4. aligns the question with the standard; and
5. enables students to acquire knowledge as a result of the question.

### **Engaging Students in Answering Text-Dependent Questions**

Fisher and Frey (2012) state that “Teachers should model for students how they think about texts and how they look for evidence in the text when responding to questions” (p. 4). Therefore, teachers must introduce and model how to answer text-dependent questions. A common practice in my classroom involves answering all four types and including them in the daily lesson plan (see Chart 1).

Chart 1: *Daily Lesson Plan*

<b>Time (minutes)</b>	<b>Frame</b>	<b>Lesson Component</b>
<b>10</b>		Introduce new vocabulary from the text
<b>5</b>		Discuss the aim of the lesson
<b>5</b>		Read the text-dependent question
<b>10</b>		Students complete and share responses to the DO NOW writing prompt

<b>40</b>	While posing discussion questions, students read chunks of the chapter while annotating the text (bursts of discussion created after each question)
<b>50</b>	Students answer the text-dependent question introduced before the “reading workout” and discuss as a group

For example, if the text-dependent question contains an unfamiliar vocabulary word, we complete a vocabulary building exercise by using the Frayer Model (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001)--a four-square graphic organizer prompting students to think about and describe the meaning of a word or concept--and we complete a Do Now activity that includes that vocabulary word before we engage in the reading. The actual reading of the text begins with clear instructions and a question or comment. For example, “As you read, pay close attention to the text details and illustrations. Describe the characters and explain what that tells you about their personalities.” Students annotate the text as they read and write statements that refer only to the question I posed before they started reading. Five to seven minutes later, we discuss our annotations as a group. Depending on the purpose or how much of the text is planned for my students to read that day, I pose three to four more questions while they annotate. The annotations and discussions among the class build a case for students to answer the text-dependent question at the end of the lesson.

### **Constructed-Response Strategy**

Before my students can thoroughly answer the writing prompt independently, I model means of answering text-dependent questions by using a constructed-response strategy, that is, by using an assessment tool requiring students to “construct” or develop their own answers without the aid of suggestions or choices. I commonly used the RACE strategy:

**Restate the question**

**Answer the question**

**Cite text evidence**

**Explain**

My 3<sup>rd</sup> graders needed clarity on how to answer text-dependent questions, so incorporating a constructed-response strategy provided structure to our daily routine. The Do Now activity and annotating the text before responding to the text-dependent question supported them during a time when they needed to work independently. For that reason, students may need assistance with restating (R) the question and using the question stem to start their answer. The answer (A) portion of the RACE strategy requires students to use facts from the text to make a statement or give an opinion. Citing (C) text evidence requires the use of specific examples from the text, such as direct quotes, to validate their answers. And when explaining (E) the answer, students must include background knowledge and experiences and must make connections in order to answer the text-dependent question thoroughly. My goal is to spend at least one week working on each component of the RACE strategy with the help of a comprehension strategy like Close Reading (Lehman & Roberts, 2013). Analyzing a Close Reading in my classroom prepares students for more complex texts that they would read and write independently. Once they understand the RACE strategy after several weeks of modeling, they are able to write their answers independently.

For example, here is a prompt I used after we read a section of Dahl's (1964) *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*: *After reading chapters 18-20, do you think Mr. Wonka is a kind or uncaring man? Use text evidence to explain your answer.* This prompt definitely required the students to read the text, determine the meaning of academic vocabulary (*uncaring*), make inferences (as aligned with CCSS), and acquire knowledge of the character (see Writing Sample 1 and Writing Sample 2):

Writing Sample 1

5-19-2016

T D Q

I think Mr. Wonka is a kind man. In the text on page 83-84 it says "Suddenly, Mr. Wonka picked up a large mug, dipped it into the river, filled it with chocolate and handed it to Charlie. It'll do you good. You looked starved to death." This tells me that he's concerned. He only gave it to Charlie but also Grandpa Joe. He didn't give it to anyone else because they look well fed. In the text it says, "Then Mr. Wonka filled a second mug and gave it to Grandpa Joe. You too, he said. You look like a skeleton! What's the matter? Hasn't there been any thing to eat in your house. This tells me that he cares about them. He doesn't want them to starve to death. On the hand, he didn't care about the other children because they had parents and looked like they had things to eat. Also he was looking like why do everyone has their parents and only Charlie has this old man with him. So, I think he's kind and uncaring.

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Mr. Willy Wonka is a kind man. In the text it says, "But now listen to me!" "I want no messing about when you go in!" "No touching, no meddling, and no tasting."

This means that he doesn't want anyone getting hurt or messing with things.

Just like what happened to Augustus. In the text it says Don't touch! And don't mess anything over. This means that he does not want anything to happen to his things. He will

let them test something out when it is time too. He is also kind because

he let them go in his secret kitchen and no one ever went in there

before. Not even his oompa loompas. In the text it says "Up to now," Mr. Wonka said, "nobody else, not even an oompa loompa, has ever been allowed in here!"

He is very very kind to let these kids go in his secret inventing room. In addition, he didn't even let his own workers go in there. They are ~~most likely~~ lucky to go in a place no one went before.

Last, allow students time to discuss their answers with their classmates when they are able to work independently. Allowing them to have discourse in groups creates independent thinkers able to make meaning of the text because they can debate and state their opinions while using textual evidence to prove their statements. My students showed great enthusiasm during the literacy block because they were able to discuss their answers to text-dependent questions at the end of the reading block.

## **Conclusion**

Text-dependent questions empower students to take a stance and challenge the author's overall message. My students enjoyed being able to write a response to a text-dependent question that demonstrated substance and meaning.

## **References**

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