

...But What's the Question?

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Email: rjones@virginia.edu

Raymond C. Jones
Curry School of Education
University of Virginia
235 Ruffner Hall, 405 Emmet Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903-2495

Question-Answer Relationships

Raphael created Question-Answer Relationships as a way to help students realize that the answers they seek are related to the type of question that is asked; it encourages them to be strategic about their search for answers based on an awareness of what different types of questions look for.

How Do QARs Work?

1. **Right There.** The answer is usually contained in a single sentence, and the words used to create the sentence are often also in that one sentence.
2. **Think and Search.** The answer is in the text, but you might have to look in several different sentences to find it.
3. **Author and You.** The answer is not in the text, but you still need information that the author has given you, combined with what you already know, in order to respond to this type of question.
4. **On My Own.** The answer is not in the text, and in fact you don't even have to have read the text to be able to answer it.

Authentic Questions

As students read, they have questions that occur to them. Perhaps these questions are about things they do not understand. Or perhaps they are things they want to know more about. Sometimes students have questions about how an idea in a current selection fits with or contradicts something else they have read. Authentic questions invites students to pose the questions they come up with as a basis for paired, group, or class discussions.

How Do They Work?

Have students use notecards or sticky notes. Tell them to write down one or two of the questions they have as they read. Explain that having questions while one reads is a sign of someone who monitors his or her comprehension, rather than an indication that one is failing to comprehend the text. In the early going, students may need prompting about the types of questions to be asked: suggest they ask a question about words they don't understand, why the subject of an article acted as he or she did, what caused a situation to occur, what might happen next, or how ideas relate to other things the students have learned. After reading, have students pair up and share their questions with one another. The pairs can pair up into groups of four and discuss the questions and how they might be answered. Call on each group to share the question they found the most provocative, or the one that generated the most discussion among them. Use those group-selected questions as part of a full class discussion.

Seed Discussions

As with Authentic Questions, the onus is on the student to come up with a question or a discussion-starter. But in this case, the goal is for the student to provoke his groupmates or classmates with a thought-provoking query or observation or debatable conclusion that he feels will cause the most discussion of the central or pivotal issues raised by the reading or by the story. In other words, the student poses a question that people cannot easily walk away from.

Questioning the Author

Questioning the Author is a protocol of inquiries that students can make about the content they are reading. This strategy is designed to encourage students to think beyond the words on the page and to consider the author's intent for the selection and his or her success at communicating it.

The idea of "questioning" the author is a way to evaluate how well a selection of text stands on its own, not simply an invitation to "challenge" a writer. Students are looking at the author's intent, his craft, his clarity, his organization...in

short, if the author has done well, students can say so, and they can identify why they say so. Likewise, if students are struggling over a selection of text, it may be because it hasn't been written very clearly. Students can see this, and say so, but then they are invited to improve on it.

How Does It Work?

The standard format involves five questions. Students read a selection of text (one or more paragraphs, but generally not as much as a whole page), and then answer these questions:

1. What is the author trying to tell you?
2. Why is the author telling you that?
3. Does the author say it clearly?
4. How could the author have said things more clearly?
5. What would you say instead?

As developed by Margaret McKeown, Isabel Beck, and Jo Worthy, Questioning the Author becomes a tool for recognizing and diagnosing inconsiderate text. Sometimes, as we know, students struggle with content not because they are failing as readers but because the author has failed as a writer. It is this notion of the "fallible author" that McKeown et al wish students to become aware of. When they think a failure to understand is their own fault, students often pull away from their reading. But if they will approach text with a "reviser's eye," as McKeown and her colleagues put it, they can shift from trying to understand text to making text more understandable.

Sticky Note Discussions

A means for active engagement with text, sticky-note discussions are a way to have students responding directly to text as they read it. Simple office sticky (Post-It) notes are used for students to record questions, thoughts, comments, reactions, and notes directly on the text where they feel provoked in their thinking.

How Do They Work?

Sticky Notes are a means for purposeful reading of text. Students can use sticky notes for a variety of purposes, ranging from note taking to question-asking to personal reaction. The sticky notes can be used extremely well in conjunction with Power Thinking: imagine having students putting sticky notes where they find Power 1s (main ideas), Power 2s (subtopics), and Power 3s (details). Or maybe they just jot notes down about key ideas as they encounter them, which they will subsequently arrange into categories or groups. Perhaps you would build an outline on the board at the front of the room by having students come up and place their sticky notes into the appropriate outline. The sticky note activity can be open-ended (very little direction) or a very directed activity (answer these five questions on your sticky notes at the point in the text where you find the key information). Students may complete outcome sentences on sticky notes (also called JumpStarters, such as: "I learned that..." "I would ask the author..."

Grandmother's Table

Once there was a feeble old woman whose husband had died and left her all alone, so she went to live with her son and his wife and their own little daughter. Every day the old woman's sight dimmed and her hearing grew worse, and sometimes at dinner her hands trembled so badly the peas rolled off her spoon or the soup ran from her cup. The son and his wife could not help but be annoyed at the way she spilled her meal all over the table, and one day, after she knocked over a glass of milk, they told each other enough was enough.

They set up a small table for her in the corner next to the broom closet and made the old woman eat her meals there. She sat all alone, looking with tear-filled eyes across the room at the others. Sometimes they

spoke to her while they ate, but usually it was to scold her for dropping a bowl or a fork.

One evening just before dinner, the little girl was busy playing on the floor with her building blocks, and her father asked her what she was making. "I'm building a little table for you and mother," she smiled, "so you can eat by yourselves in the corner someday when I get big."

Her parents sat staring at her for some time and then suddenly both began to cry. That night they led the old woman back to her place at the big table. From then on she ate with the rest of the family, and her son and his wife never seemed to mind a bit when she spilled something every now and then.

Adapted from the Brothers Grimm