

Essential Questions



**Module 2: Curriculum Mapping –
Developing Units of Instruction**

Viewing Time: 1 hour and 16 minutes

Mastering Curriculum Mapping Module 2 - Activity 2

Essential questions are engaging, deep questions that lead a student to the insight of the essential understanding for the unit of study. They are questions that point to important ideas and processes in content areas and are essential to understanding the subject or the discipline. In the processes of curriculum mapping and deconstructing standards, we break apart standards that consist of more than one learning target, rewrite them and organize the new learning targets by quarter. Doing so enables us to see the big ideas and essential understandings for the content that we teach. Our next step is to develop essential questions for each quarter which helps us to further define the essential understandings, big ideas and units of instruction.

Activity Objective(s):

1. Examine the characteristics essential questions.
2. Write essential questions.



Overview: An essential question can be thought of as a doorway. By exploring this question, we are leading learners into exploring larger and important ideas about content. By leading with a question, our goal is to get the students to make sense of things, to come to an understanding. For this activity, you will think about what makes an essential question and practice developing essential questions.

Materials: *Repacking with Essential Questions* Tool (included with this activity).

Estimated Time to Complete Activity: 15 minutes



Step 1: View Module 2 and become familiar with essential questions.

Step 2: Complete the Common Characteristics of Essential Questions chart (on page five of the *Repacking with Essential Questions* Tool).

Step 3: Write five essential questions for the essential understanding listed on page six of the *Repacking with Essential Questions* Tool.

Adaptations or Extensions for this Activity:



For Professional Reflection: What was your level of experience with essential questions prior to taking this course? To what extent do you use essential questions in your practice? Make a concrete plan to work with essential questions as a part of your planning, teaching, and assessing cycle. (Continued)

NAME: _____



Essential Questions

Adaptations or Extensions for this Activity:



For Professional Reflection (Continued): How and when will you use essential questions in the curriculum mapping process? Reflect on your comfort level with this step of the process. How will you seek continued practice with using essential questions?



For your Professional Portfolio: Does this activity help accomplish a school wide improvement goal or an individual goal for professional growth? Include a copy of this activity in your Professional Portfolio as evidence of reflective practice in the area of curriculum planning. This activity can serve as a portfolio artifact that demonstrates your effort to apply what you have learned. Thus improving your knowledge of curriculum as well as your understanding of planning standards-based instruction.



For Professional Learning Groups/Independent Study (peer or small group): Meet with your Professional Learning Group after viewing Module 2. Complete the *Repacking with Essential Questions* Tool with a partner or small group. After completing the tool, discuss your comfort level with essential questions. Discuss how essential questions help to further define big ideas and essential understandings.



Course facilitator for this course (university or professional development setting): Utilize this activity as a small group activity while viewing Module 2. Pause after viewing the segment about essential questions. Review the concepts, check for understanding, have small groups complete the *Repacking with Essential Questions* Tool and share with the whole group. For additional practice have each small group identify a big idea, swap big ideas with another group and brainstorm essential questions for that group's big idea. Finally, have the small groups who swapped merge with each other and share the essential questions that were developed.



For sharing this activity on a Learning Community Site (such as the EI Online Community Bulletin Boards): How do essential questions fit into the curriculum mapping process? Post your answer on the Learning Community Site for this course. Review the other posts for this activity discussion. Did any of the answers listed by your colleagues give you a new perspective?

NAME:



Deconstructing Standards Practice: Repacking with Essential Questions Tool

At-A-Glance:

- 1) Common Characteristics of Essential Questions chart.
- 2) Write five essential questions.



ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS are...

- stated in question form.
- 2-5 questions per unit.
- designed to focus the students on the essential understandings.
- designed to require multiple experiences and thinking between the lines to uncover the answers.
- questions with multiple answers that require an extended response or discussion.
- questions with answers that have degrees of sophistication rather than right and wrong responses.
- engaging and transfer to other areas.
- questions that lead to other "I wonder..." questions.

~Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins

NAME:

Deconstructing Standards Practice: Repacking with Essential Questions Tool

Example 1

Essential Understanding:

Students will understand that the USDA Food Pyramid presents relative guidelines for nutrition.

Essential Questions:

- What is the USDA Food Pyramid?
- **Better** Why is the USDA Pyramid just a relative guideline?
- **Best** Does a relative guideline mean that it changes? What would make it change?

Example 2

Essential Understanding:

Dietary requirements vary for individuals based upon age, activity level, weight and health.

Good Essential Questions:

What is healthy eating? Could a healthy diet for one person be unhealthy for another? If we know so much about diets and health, why do we have so many health problems caused by diet?

NAME:

Deconstructing Standards Practice: Repacking with Essential Questions Tool

1. Complete the Common Characteristics of Essential Questions chart.

YES EXAMPLES	NO EXAMPLES
<p>Why can't a fish live in the desert?</p> <p>In what ways do effective writers hook and hold their readers?</p> <p>Who wins and who loses when technologies change?</p> <p>How would life be different if we couldn't measure time?</p>	<p>How many legs does a spider have?</p> <p>How does an elephant use its trunk?</p> <p>What is foreshadowing? Can you find an example in the story?</p> <p>What is the original meaning of the term technology (from the Greek root "techne")?</p> <p>How many minutes in an hour? How many hours in a day? How many days in a year?</p>
<p>List 2 common characteristics of the "yes" examples that the "no" examples do not have:</p>	

NAME:

Deconstructing Standards Practice: Repacking with Essential Questions Tool

2. Write 5 essential questions for this essential understanding.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

The student will understand that successful writers have great control over language and know how to create the desired impact through choice and placement of words.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

NAME: _____