

MRA – The Use and Purpose of Essential Questions and Supporting Questions/Enduring Understandings

At MRA we believe that it is our role as educators to engage students in learning, and we strive to help them make connections to make that learning relevant. It is not our job to simply tell students what they need to learn, but instead we seek to help them discover learning through facilitating discussions and guiding them toward a deep and comprehensive understanding of the content. We do this through the use of meaningful themes and project based learning. Within those themes and projects, and within the supportive units, we use essential questions and supporting questions as tools for student engagement. If you, as the teacher, aren't engaged and interested in the question/s, your students won't be either. A question isn't essential unless it awakens, heightens, or challenges thought.

It is expected that:

1. Teachers collaborate to create thoughtful essential questions that tie into their unit and theme.
2. Essential questions follow the criteria below.
3. Teachers collaborate to create thoughtful supporting questions for each unit.
4. Essential questions are used repeatedly to engage students.
5. Supporting questions are used repeatedly to engage students.
6. Students interact with all questions.

Essential questions (page 3, Essential Questions: Opening Doors for Student Understanding):

1. Are open ended with no single correct answer
2. Are thought provoking and intellectually engaging, sparking discussion and debate.
3. Call for higher order thinking such as analysis, inference, evaluation and prediction.
4. Point toward important, transferable ideas within disciplines.
5. Raise additional question and further inquiry.
6. Require support and justification.
7. Recur over time – are revisited again and again.

Supporting Questions/Enduring Understandings get to the core ideas or processes that have lasting value. These are the pieces that we want students to walk away with and use years from now.