

What Makes a Good “Essential Question?”

While there are several different adjectives to describe the types of questions that motivate a student to think more deeply about a topic, the three sources we referenced have similar filters through which they sift their questions. What common elements do you see?

<i>Understanding by Design</i> McTighe and Wiggins	CES and Essential Moral Questions	Good Guiding Questions Traver
<p>Essential questions share common characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have no one obvious right answer • Raise other important questions, often across subject-area boundaries • Address the philosophical or conceptual foundations of a discipline • Recur naturally • Are framed to provoke and sustain student interest 	<p>In general, Essential Questions are defined by CES fairly broadly as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big—global in scope • Related to what it means to be a citizen of the world • Unanswerable • Interesting, intriguing • Important • Challenging 	<p>Good guiding questions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open ended, yet focus inquiry on a specific topic • Non-judgmental, but answering them requires high-level cognitive work, such as the development of a rich description, model, evaluation or judgment • Contain emotive force and intellectual bite. As students, educators, and world citizens, we must try to answer them. • Succinct. They contain only a handful of words—yet they demand a lot

Whether “essential” questions are used to focus the curriculum of an entire school for the whole year or to drive the learning for one unit of study in a subject area, “choosing the right questions can lead learners to higher, more meaningful achievement” (Traver).