Text-Dependent Question Stems

A text-dependent question can only be answered by going back into the text. Students should not be able to answer it from background knowledge, personal opinion or a quick skim. Every stem below asks for evidence, so pair each one with a prompt like "Cite the line or paragraph that shows this."

The sections run in a deliberate order, from understanding what the text says, to how it says it, to what it means and how it connects to other texts. Start a close-reading sequence at Level 1 and climb. Most lessons need only 4–6 questions total.

Level	Focus	DOK
1. Key ideas and details	What the text says	1, 2
2. Vocabulary and word choice	Meaning and effect of words	2, 3
3. Text structure	How the parts fit together	2, 3
4. Purpose and point of view	Who is speaking and why	3
5. Inference, theme and central idea	What the text means	3
6. Argument, claims and evidence	How well the text makes its case	3, 4
7. Comparing texts and synthesis	How texts relate	4

Level 1: Key ideas and details (Literal)

Use these first to confirm students understand what *literally* happens or what is *stated* before moving to analysis.

Locating information

- According to the text, what/who/when/where ___? Point to the sentence that tells you.
- What does the author say about ___ in paragraph ___?
- Which details in the text describe ___?
- What reasons does the text give for ___?

Sequence and events

- What happens right before/after ___? How do you know?
- What event causes ___? Find the sentence that shows the connection.
- List the steps in ___ as the text describes them. (info)
- What changes between the beginning and the end of the passage?

Characters, people and setting

- What does ___ do when ___? What does that action show about them? (lit)
- What words does the author use to describe ___?
- How do other characters react to ___? Cite their words or actions. (lit)
- How does the setting affect what ___ does or feels? (lit)
- What role does ___ play in the events described? (info)

Relationships among ideas

- How are ___ and ___ connected, according to the text?
- What effect does ___ have on ___?
- How does the text explain the difference between ___ and ___? (info)

Level 2: Vocabulary and word choice (Structural)

These move students from what a word means to *why* the author chose it.

Meaning from context

- What does the word ___ mean in paragraph ___? Which nearby words or phrases help you figure it out?
- The word ___ has several meanings. Which meaning fits here, and how do you know?
- What does the phrase ___ mean as it is used in this sentence?

Connotation and tone

- Why does the author use ___ instead of a word like ___? How would the meaning change?
- What feeling or attitude does the word ___ suggest?
- Which words create a ___ (tense, hopeful, angry) tone in this section?
- How does the author's word choice show how they feel about ___?

Figurative language (lit, literary nonfiction)

- What is being compared in the line ___? What does the comparison help you understand?
- What does the author mean by ___? Why not say it literally?
- What image does the phrase ___ create? How does it connect to the mood of the passage?
- How does the repetition of ___ affect the reader?

Technical and domain vocabulary (info)

- How does the author define or explain ___ for the reader?
- Why might the author include the term ___? What does it add to the explanation?
- How does the meaning of ___ develop over the course of the text?

Level 3: Text structure (Structural)

These ask how the pieces of a text are *arranged* and *why that arrangement matters.*

Overall organization

- How is this text organized (chronological, cause and effect, problem and solution, compare and contrast)? Which signal words tell you? (info)
- Why might the author have chosen to organize the text this way?
- How would the text be different if it were told in a different order?

Role of a part

- How does paragraph ___ connect to the paragraph before it?

- What is the purpose of the opening/closing paragraph?
- Why does the author include the section about ___? What would be lost without it?
- How does the heading/subheading/caption/graphic help you understand ___? (info)
- How does the sentence ___ contribute to the development of ___?

Plot and narrative structure (lit)

- How does the flashback/foreshadowing in ___ affect your understanding of the story?
- Which event is the turning point? What in the text makes it the turning point?
- How does the author build suspense in this section?
- How does the stanza/scene structure contribute to the meaning? (poetry and drama)

Level 4: Author's purpose and point of view (Inferential)

These ask who is telling the story or making the case, and what they want the reader to *think or feel.*

Author's purpose

- What is the author's main purpose in this text (to inform, persuade, explain, entertain)? Which details show it?
- Why does the author include the anecdote/quotation/statistic about ___?
- What does the author want readers to think or do after reading? Cite the lines that suggest this. (info)

Narrator and perspective (lit)

- Who is telling the story? How does that choice affect what the reader knows?
- How would this scene change if it were told from ___'s point of view?
- How do ___'s and ___'s perspectives on ___ differ? Find a line from each.
- What does the reader know that ___ does not? How does that create suspense or humor (dramatic irony)?

Author's point of view (info)

- What is the author's position on ___? Which words or phrases reveal it?
- How does the author acknowledge or respond to people who disagree?
- How does the author distinguish their view from the views of others?
- What might the author's background or role suggest about their perspective, based on the text?

Level 5: Inference, theme and central idea (Inferential)

These ask students to *read between the lines*, always anchored to specific evidence.

Making inferences

- What can you infer about ___ from ___? Which details support your inference?
- Why do you think ___ says/does ___? What in the text leads you to that conclusion?

- What does the author suggest, but not state directly, about ___?
- What is ___ feeling in this moment, even though they don't say it? How can you tell? (lit)

Character development (lit)

- How does ___ change from the beginning to the end? Identify the moment the change begins.
- What motivates ___ to ___? Cite evidence.
- How does the conflict between ___ and ___ reveal something about each of them?

Theme (lit)

- What lesson or message about ___ (friendship, courage, fairness) does the story develop?
- How does the title connect to the theme?
- Which event or line best captures the theme? Explain why.
- How does the author develop the theme over the course of the text through ___ (a character, a symbol, the setting)?
- What does ___ symbolize? How do you know?

Central idea (info)

- What is the central idea of this text? Which two or three details most support it?
- How does the author develop the central idea across sections?
- Write an objective summary of the text without your own opinions. What details belong, and which do not?
- How does the section on ___ support or refine the central idea?

Level 6: Argument, claims and evidence (Inferential)

These ask students to *evaluate* how well a text supports what it claims. They fit editorials, speeches, essays and informational articles best.

Identifying the argument

- What claim is the author making about ___? Where is it stated most clearly?
- What reasons does the author give to support the claim?
- What counterclaim does the author address? How do they respond to it?

Evaluating evidence

- What kinds of evidence does the author use (facts, statistics, expert quotes, examples, personal stories)?
- Which piece of evidence is the strongest support for the claim? Why?
- Is the evidence about ___ relevant and sufficient? What is missing?
- Which statements are facts that could be checked, and which are opinions?

Reasoning and rhetoric

- How does the author connect the evidence back to the claim?
- Is there a point where the reasoning is weak or makes a leap? Quote it.
- How does the author appeal to the reader's emotions, sense of logic, or trust?

- Why might the author place the strongest evidence at the beginning/end?

Level 7: Comparing texts and synthesis (Action-Oriented)

Use these once students know each text well. Require evidence from *both* texts in every answer.

Across texts on the same topic

- How do Text A and Text B present ___ differently? Cite one detail from each.
- Where do the two authors agree, and where do they disagree?
- Which text gives stronger support for its view on ___? Explain with evidence from both.
- What does Text B add to your understanding of ___ that Text A does not?

Across genres and media

- How does the poem/story treat ___ differently from the informational article?
- How does the film/audio/graphic version of ___ differ from the written text? What is gained or lost?
- How does a modern work draw on ___ (a myth, a traditional story, a historical event)? What did the author change? (lit)
- How does a fictional portrayal of ___ compare with the historical account? (lit + info)

Synthesis

- Using both texts, explain ___.
- How might the author of Text A respond to ___ in Text B?
- What theme or central idea do both texts share, even though they approach it differently?

Tips and student sentence frames

Tips for writing your own questions

- Name the exact paragraph, line or moment so students know where to look.
- Test the question: if a student could answer it without reading, rewrite it.
- Order questions so each one builds on the last, ending with a culminating question.
- Use "how" and "why" more than "what" once basic comprehension is secure.
- Mix quick oral questions with one or two that require a written, evidence-based answer.

Sentence frames for citing evidence

- According to the text, …
- In paragraph ___, the author states, "…"
- The text shows ___ when it says …
- For example, …
- This suggests that …

Sentence frames for explaining evidence

- This shows that … because …
- The word ___ reveals …
- This detail is important because …
- The author includes this to …
- Based on ___, I can infer that …

A simple response structure: RACE, ACE

1. **R**ephrase the question (can be combined with **A**).
2. **A**nswer it directly.
3. **C**ite evidence from the text.
4. **E**xplain how the evidence supports the answer.

CER

1. **C**laim
2. **E**vidence
3. **R**easoning