

Handout

Compelling Questions for Literary Analysis

Directions: As a group, choose four or five questions from the list to help guide your discussion. Support your ideas by citing evidence from the text, by making connections to other texts (books, films, music, poetry, artwork, etc.), and by sharing how the text connects to your own identity and experiences in the world.

Understanding the Characters

1. How do the main characters in your text see themselves? How do others see them?
2. How are the main characters' identities being shaped and reshaped by the people and circumstances they encounter?
3. What kinds of challenges do the main characters face? How do they deal with these challenges? What words of advice do you have for them?
4. Who are the different groups of people in your text? Who has power and who does not? How does the amount of power each character has influence their choices? How does power influence the impact of each character's decisions?
5. Which character do you most relate to and why? Which character do you least relate to and why?

Considering Characters' Choices

6. What choices do characters make in the chapters or sections you just read? What other choices could they have made?
7. What are all of the factors that impact the choices characters in your text have and how they make decisions? Do you think these factors reflect what it's like in the world today?
8. What are the spoken and unspoken rules of the place where your text takes place? Who makes the rules? How do the rules impact the main characters and the choices that are available to them? How are those rules similar to or different from the spoken and unspoken rules of your home, school, or community?
9. Where do you see characters acting as perpetrators of injustice or unfairness? What factors motivate their behavior?

10. Where do you see characters acting as bystanders who choose not to take action? What factors impact their decision? How do they feel about themselves? How might the situation in the text change if they made a different decision?
11. Where do you see characters choosing to be upstanders, taking action against an unfairness or injustice? How do their choices and actions impact those around them? How do they feel about themselves?
12. Where do you find yourself judging characters for their decisions and actions?

Thinking about Perspective

13. A character's attitudes and beliefs about the world around them make up their perspective. In your text, whose perspective(s) does the reader get to see? How does this impact your understanding of what is happening in the story?
14. For the character(s) whose perspective you get to see, what do they think and feel about their situation and about the other characters in the text? Why do you think the author chose to develop this character's perspective?
15. Whose perspectives are missing from the story? Are there any characters who don't have a voice or who the reader only sees through the eyes of other characters? What do you think those characters are thinking and feeling? Why do you think the author chose not to develop their perspectives?
16. Why do you think the author chose to tell the story from the perspective(s) they did? What other choices could the author have made? How would that have changed the story?

Connecting the Text, the World, and Yourself

17. How does this text reflect your own identity or life experience?
18. How does this text help you understand someone else's life experience?
19. What social issues are explored in the text (for example, racial injustice, gender discrimination, disability rights, voting rights, refugee crisis, LGBTQ+ rights, gun violence, income inequality, housing and food insecurity, the ethics of science and technology)? What message does the text send about one or more of these issues?
20. What does this text say about the world today?
21. Why do you think the author wrote this text?
22. What lessons can you take from this text into your own life?