

## Enduring Understandings and Essential Questions in Language Arts and Literature

### Literature

**Great stories/books address universal themes of human existence and conflict.**

**Great stories raise questions (and sometimes provide answers).**

- What makes a great book/story great?
- Is a "good read" always a great book?
- What is the relationship between popularity and greatness in literature?
- Why read fiction?
- Can fiction reveal truth? Can novels reveal truths about human nature?
- What is the relationship between "fiction" and "truth?"
- Can a fictional story be "true"?
- Is "historical fiction" a contradiction?
- How are stories from other places and times about me?
- What can fairy tales from around the world teach us?
- What's new and what's old?
- Have we run across this idea before?
- So what? Why does it matter? What does it mean?

**Fiction can entertain while revealing truths.**

- What is a story?
- Can fiction reveal truth?
- What can we learn from fiction?
- What is the relationship between "fiction" and "truth?"
- Can a fictional story be "true"?
- Is "historical fiction" a contradiction?
- Should a story teach you something?
- Must a story have a moral?; heroes and villains?

**Literature can reflect, clarify and criticize the times it portrays.**

- Does literature reflect culture or shape it?

### Reading

- Why read?
- What can we learn from print?
- How do reading and listening differ?
- What would happen if people couldn't read?
- What do good readers sound like?
- Can a machine (e.g., scanner, robot) learn to read?

**Letters represent sounds.**

**Letters can blend to make a single sound.**

**The same letters combinations can produce different sounds.**

**Letters combine in specific ways to form words.**

- What sounds are in letter? words?
- What if all letters made only one sound?
- How are letters, words and sentences formed?
- Why does letter order matter? What if the letters were scrambled?

**Words have meaning – they represent objects, ideas, situations, and feelings.**

**Some words describe what we see, hear, taste, touch and smell.**

**Some words tell what we think.**

**Some words tell what we feel.**

- What if words could mean anything at all?
- Why does word order matter? What if the words were scrambled?

**Punctuation marks aid comprehension by signaling how to read and interpret text.**

**Punctuation marks are like traffic signs and signals. They keep the reader on track so they do not get "lost".**

- Why have punctuation marks?
- What if we didn't have/use punctuation marks?

**The goal of reading is to make meaning from text.**

- What is the author saying?
- What does the text mean?

**Different types of texts (e.g. narrative, mystery, biography, expository, persuasive) have different structures.**

**Understanding a text's structure helps one understand its meaning.**

- How do texts differ?
- How should I read different types of texts?
- What is a "beginning"? an "ending"?
- Must a story have a beginning, middle, and end?
- Titles signal the text's meaning.
- What if we didn't have/use titles?

**Effective readers use specific strategies to help them better understand (e.g., using context clues, predicting what will come next, questioning the text, re-reading).**

**Readers can use words they know to help them read new words.**

**Effective readers question the text.**

- What do good readers do?
- What do good readers when they don't understand?
- What do good readers when the text doesn't make sense?
- Pictures, graphics, illustrations can enhance text.
- Why include pictures (graphics, illustrations, etc.)?
- How do you "read" a picture?

**Effective readers bring various stances (e.g., global, critical, personal) to make meaning from text.**

- What is the gist? What is the main idea?
- Does experience and belief influence reading?
- What does this mean to me?

**Everybody is entitled to an opinion about what a text means, but some opinions are more supportable by the text than others.**

- What does it mean? How do I know?
- What is the author saying? How do I know?
- Writers sometimes convey ideas indirectly (e.g., satire, irony).
- How can you read "read between the lines"?
- What does the author really mean?

**There is no such thing as a "neutral" text since writers bring their personal experiences, perspectives and philosophies to their writing.**

**Critical readers question the text, consider different perspectives, and look for author bias.**

- What can we believe?
- From whose viewpoint are we reading?
- What is the author's angle or perspective?
- What should we do when texts/authors disagree?

### **Writing**

**Writing conveys meaning.**

- Why write?
- What if writing didn't exist?
- How do writers express their thoughts and feelings?
- What is a "complete" thought?
- Does a writer have an obligation to help the reader understand?
- Why and how do people create? How do we express ourselves?
- Why share personal experiences through writing?
- Is the pen mightier than the sword?

**Writing is a timeless form of communication.**

**Writing enables you to "talk to" people who aren't there.**

- How is written language different from spoken language?
- How can the dead speak to the living?
- Can a machine (e.g., scanner, robot) learn to write?

**Effective writers use specific techniques (style, word choice, organization) to better inform, entertain, and persuade.**

- What makes writing worth reading?
- How do effective writers hook and hold their readers?
- Where do ideas for writing come from?
- How do writers decide what to write?
- What makes writing flow?
- What makes writing easy to follow?
- Does a writer have an obligation to help the reader understand?

**Audience and purpose (e.g., inform, entertain, persuade, provoke) influence literary technique (e.g., style, word choice).**

- Why am I writing? For whom?

- What am I trying to achieve through my writing?
- Who will read my writing?
- What will work best for my audience?

**Genre influences organization, technique and style.**

- How do great mystery writers hook and hold their readers?
- How do great biographers hook and hold their readers?
- How do great storytellers hook and hold their readers?
- How does an effective persuader persuade their readers?
- What is the best "beginning"? ending?
- What is the best order (sequence)?
- What makes writing easy to follow?
- What is "flow"? What makes writing flow?

**Writing helps us clarify, as well as express, our thoughts.**

- Why write?
- How can writing lead to self-discovery?
- A writer once said, "How do I know what I think until I see what I write." Agree?

**Writers may convey ideas indirectly (e.g., satire, irony).**

- How can you say something without saying it?

**Listening**

- How is listening different from reading?
- How is written language different from spoken language?
- What do good speakers sound like?

**Effective listeners use specific techniques to help them understand the speaker.**

- What is a good listener?
- How could someone be a bad listener?
- Can one "listen" but not hear?
- Can a machine (e.g., Via Voice, robot) listen?

**Speaking**

**Speaking conveys meaning.**

- Why speak?
- What do good speakers sound like?
- What if people couldn't talk?
- Can animals "talk"?
- How is spoken language different from written language?
- How do we express ourselves orally?
- How do good speakers express their thoughts and feelings?
- What is a "complete" thought?
- What makes a speaker easy to follow?
- Does a speaker have an obligation to help the listener understand?
- How can I help the listener understand me?

### **Why learn another language**

**Audience and purpose (e.g., inform, entertain, motivate, persuade, embarrass, provoke) influence speaker's technique (e.g., volume, pacing, word choice, intonation).**

- Why am I speaking?
- What am I trying to say?
- To whom am I speaking?
- Who will listen?
- Why are they listening?
- How can I help them understand me?

**Non-verbals (e.g., gestures, intonation, pace, posture, expression) enhance or detract from the message.**

- How can you "speak" without words?
- What is "body language"?
- How can I help my listener(s) better understand me?
- How can you make your words more effective?

McTighe, Jay. "Samples of Essential Questions ." Oak Grove High School Academics Teacher Resources. Jay McTighe, Understanding by Design, n.d. Web. 27 Sep 2011.  
<[http://og.ca.campusgrid.net/home/Academics/Teacher+Information?file=essential\\_questions.htm](http://og.ca.campusgrid.net/home/Academics/Teacher+Information?file=essential_questions.htm)>.