

# Curriculum-Framing Questions

**What Are They, and How Do They Help Teachers and Students?**

# What are Curriculum-Framing Questions?

Curriculum-Framing Questions guide a unit of study and include Essential, Unit, and Content Questions.

## É *Essential Questions*

- Are broad, open-ended questions
- Address big ideas and enduring concepts
- Often cross disciplines and help students see how subjects are related

## É *Unit Questions*

- Are open-ended questions that tie directly to a project or unit
- Help students demonstrate the scope of their understanding of a subject

## É *Content Questions*

- Are fact-based, concrete questions
- Have a narrow set of correct answers
- Often relate to definitions, identifications, and general recall of information (example: questions found on a test)

# What is the Difference Between Essential and Unit Questions?

## Essential Questions:

- É Are broad in scope
- É Provide bridges between disciplines and units of study
  - Example: How does conflict produce change?

## Unit Questions:

- É Are tied to a specific topic or unit of study
- É Support and continue the study of an Essential Question

### Examples:

- How does stress on the environment impact evolution?
- How are changes in economics a factor in war?
- In the story, *Charlotte's Web*, how do the animals' different abilities help Wilbur survive and succeed?

# How are Content Questions Different?

Content Questions differ from Unit and Essential Questions:

- É Content Questions deal mostly with facts, rather than the interpretation of those facts
- É They typically have clear-cut answers

Examples:

- É How are volcanoes made?
- É What is photosynthesis?
- É Why is it cold in the winter when the sun is shining?
- É How do you find the values of unknowns in equations?
- É What is a fable?

# Why Use Curriculum-Framing Questions?

To target higher-order thinking skills

É To require comparison, synthesis, interpretation, evaluation, etc.

To ensure student projects are compelling and engaging

É To require more than a simple restatement of facts

To focus on important topics

É To connect learning to other disciplines and other topics of study

É To ask questions that have been asked throughout human history

É To address compelling questions that students ask

# How Do Essential Questions Help Teachers?

They help teachers focus on important topics in their year-long curriculum and bring meaning across subject areas:

- É They raise important questions across content areas (Math, Science, Literature, History, etc.).
- É They center around major issues, problems, concerns, interests, or themes that also occur in other units.

# How Do Essential Questions Help Students?

They help to engage students:

- É Essential Questions bring meaning and focus to the study of events and topics throughout a project or course, which otherwise may seem arbitrary or unrelated.
- É They engage students' imagination and connect the subject with their own experiences and ideas.
- É There is no one, obvious "right" answer, so students are challenged to explore many possibilities.
- É They encourage in-depth discussion and research, and set the stage for further questioning.

They help students compare, contrast, and make analogies.

- É Questions are relevant, compelling, interesting, and are written in age-appropriate, student language.

# What is the Difference Between an Essential Question and a Content Question?

| Essential Questions                              | Fact-based, “One” Answer Content Questions               |
|--|--|
| How does art reflect culture or change it?       | What is renaissance art?                                 |
| How does an organism succeed in its environment? | What is the life cycle of a frog?                        |
| How does conflict produce change?                | What is the conflict in the story...?                    |
| Why do laws change?                              | How are laws made?                                       |
| Is history a history of progress?                | Who is an important inventor and what did he/she invent? |

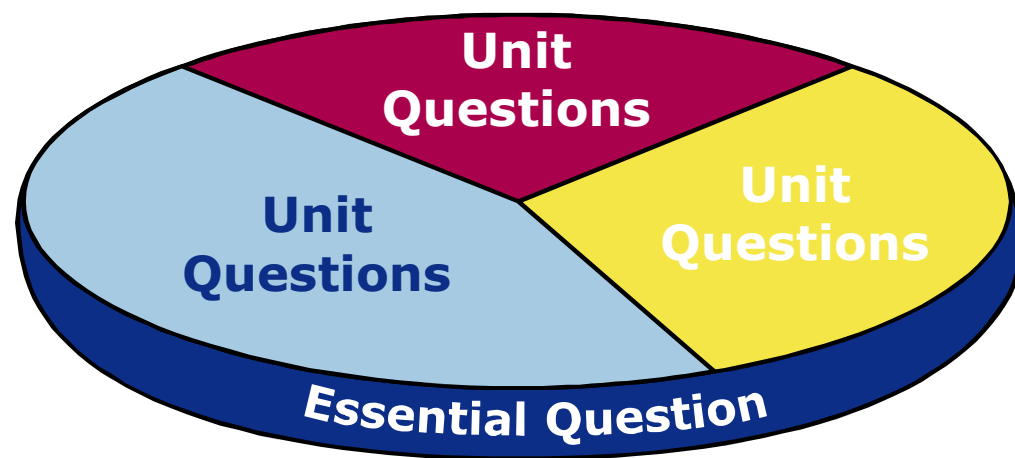
[Click here to see how a team of teachers can use one Essential Question](#)



# How Can Different Unit Questions Support a Single Essential Question?

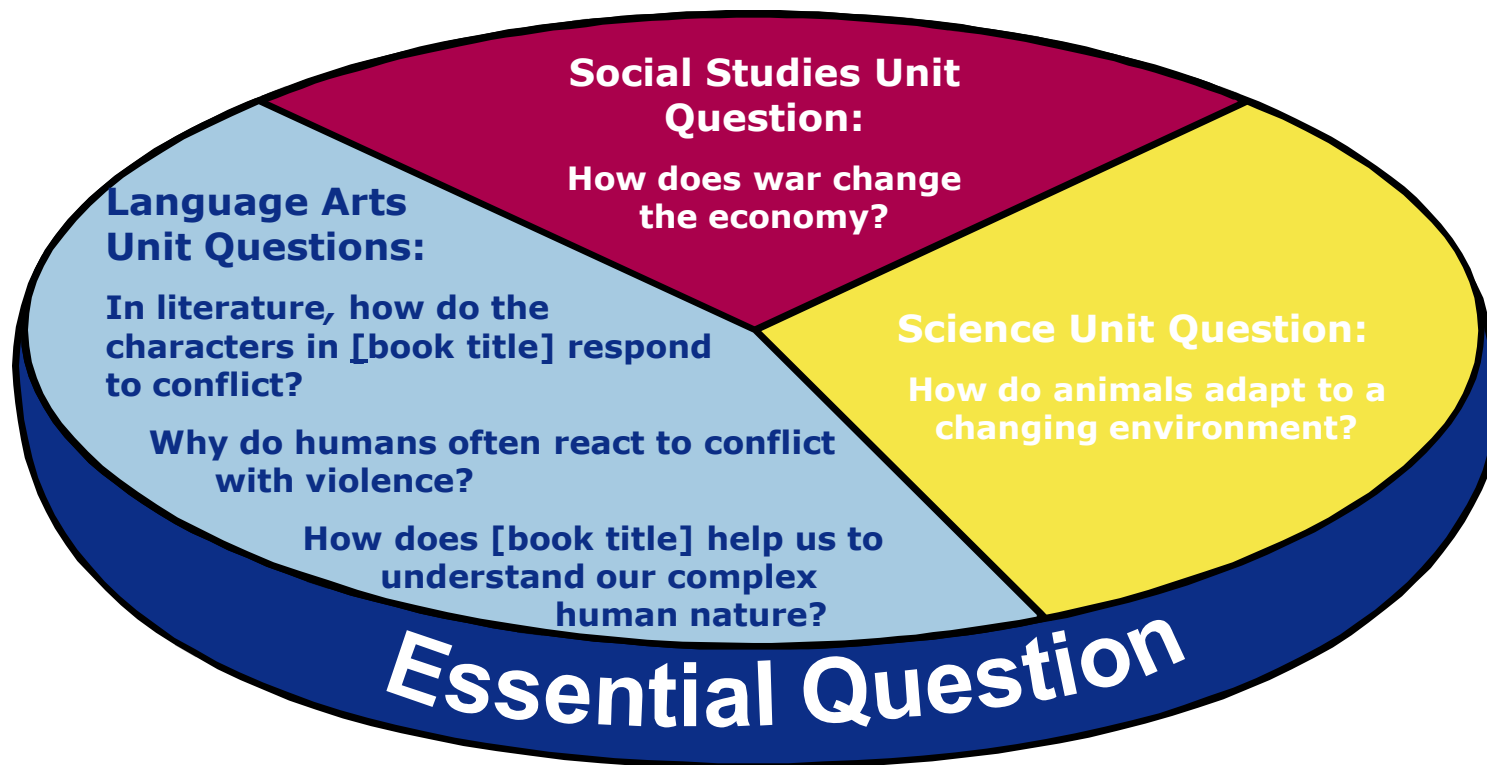
Unit Questions asked in one course of study can explore different facets of an Essential Question.

É Teams of teachers from different disciplines can use their own unique Unit Questions to support one common, unifying Essential Question.



# How Can Different Unit Questions Support a Single Essential Question?

How does conflict produce change?



# How Do Unit Questions Support Essential Questions?

| Essential Question   | Unit Questions   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How can math help me understand the world around me?</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>¿ What are fractals good for?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why have stories always been important throughout history?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>¿ Why do we still read Shakespeare?<br/>How is Shakespeare's work relevant to my life?</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How does art reflect or change society?</li> </ul>                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>¿ How does impressionist art reflect life in the late 1800's?</li> <li>¿ How does your own art reflect your life and culture?</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does it take to change the world?</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>¿ How did the policies or actions of Abraham Lincoln affect America in the 1860's?</li> <li>¿ How do the policies and actions of Abraham Lincoln affect your life today?</li> </ul> |

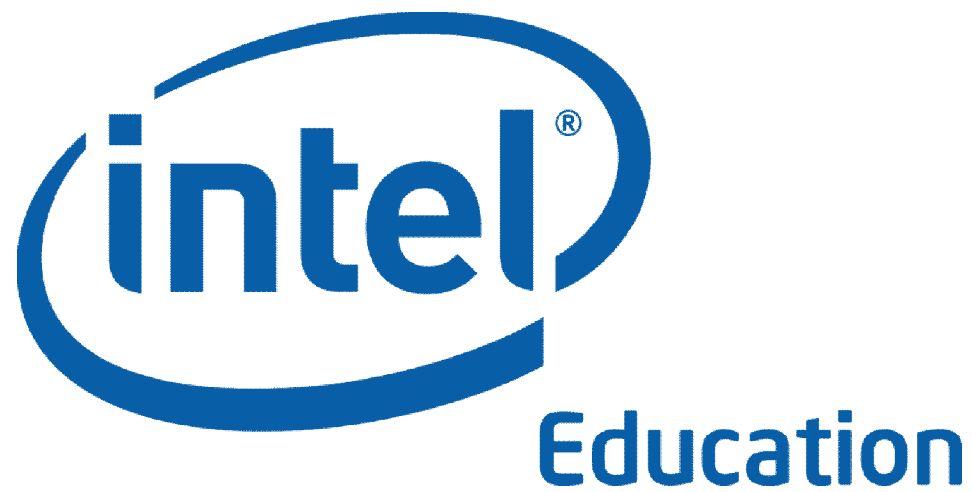
# How are Essential and Unit Questions Related to Curriculum Frameworks?

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>4th Grade Standard</b><br>(California) | É Students will know that plate tectonics account for important features of Earth's surface and major geologic events.                  |
| <b>Sample objective</b>                   | É Students will demonstrate and explain how volcanoes and different types of mountains result from plate motions.                       |
| <b>Essential Question</b>                 | É How does the earth change?  |
| <b>Unit Question</b>                      | É Could a volcano erupt in my backyard?   |
| <b>Content Questions</b>                  | É How are mountains made?<br>É What are the different layers of the earth?<br>É How do igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic rocks form? |

[Click here to see another sample](#)

# How are Essential and Unit Questions Related to Curriculum Frameworks?

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>10th Grade Standard</b><br>(Oregon) | É Students will understand how literature records, reflects, communicates, and influences human events. ...Students will identify themes in literary works and provide support for interpretations from the text. |
| <b>Sample objective</b>                | É Students will identify a common theme in one of Shakespeare's plays and in a contemporary work, comparing and contrasting the theme's development.  |
| <b>Essential Question</b>              | É Why have stories always been important throughout human history?  |
| <b>Unit Questions</b>                  | É Why do we still read Shakespeare?<br>É How do Shakespeare's poems and plays impact and accurately reflect modern life?  |
| <b>Content Questions</b>               | É What is the conflict and resolution of the play?<br>É What is iambic pentameter?  |



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