**Question Formulation Technique**

**RATIONALE**

The **Question Formulation Technique** helps students articulate, refine and prioritize questions they have about ideas raised in a text, a problem they hope to solve, or any topic they are studying. This strategy was designed by the Right Question Project ([**www.rightquestion.org**](http://www.rightquestion.org/)).

This simple strategy can be easily integrated into the classroom.

It can be used as a

* brainstorming technique
* way to access and organize background knowledge at the beginning of a unit
* way to synthesize information at any time during a unit
* a way to build an assessment activity

**PROCEDURE**

***Step One: Create a prompt***The most effective prompts for this activity are statements that are focused clearly enough so that there is a direct link to the purpose of the lesson and are neutral enough so that students feel freely respond to the prompt. Many teachers use prompts that begin with stems such as “Your role/task is to…” or “You want to / A group wants to.” A prompt could also be a description of a class project.

*Examples:*

* You want to prevent genocide from never happening again.
* Your role is to draft a class contract - a list of rules or expectations - that we will follow this year.
* After World War II, the Allies want to achieve justice for the crimes committed by the Nazis.
* You will design a way to teach other students about media literacy.

The teacher can also use visual prompts – a movie or a series of images – as a prompt. After students view the visual prompt, proceed to step two.

***Step Two: Students generate questions***

In groups, give students a fixed amount of time (5-10 minutes) to generate a list of questions, adhering to these rules:

1. Write down the questions exactly as they are said.
2. Do not stop to discuss or answer the questions.
3. Write down as many questions as you can.
4. Statements should be rephrased as questions.

***Step three: Students identify open and closed questions***Ask students to look at their lists and put an “O” by all of the open-ended questions (questions with many possible answers) and a “C” by questions that elicit one answer (a “yes/no” question or a question with a factual answer).

Then, have students change one of their open questions into a closed question and one closed

question into an open question.

**Question Formulation Technique (continued)**

***Step four: Students prioritize questions***

Have groups select 3 questions from their list. It could be the three questions they find most interesting or important or the three questions that they think need to be addressed first.

***Step five: Groups share questions***

When groups present their questions, ask them to share why they selected these three. The questions that the class generates can be used as the focus of a class discussion, a writing assignment, a research project, or as a tool to help you plan future lessons.

***Step six: Reflections***

Give students the opportunity to reflect on this process by writing in a journal and/or through a brief discussion. Here are some possible reflection questions for students to answer:

* What did you learn about formulating questions?
* What did you learn about the content?
* What did you learn about your about your own priorities?
* What did you learn about working with others?
* What challenges did you encounter?
* How did you manage these challenges?

You might also give students the opportunity to select one or two questions, from their own list or from another group’s list that they would most like to pursue and then write about why they selected this question.

IDEAS: