Thinking Routines: Questions to Begin and End a Lesson
by Joshua Rashon Streeter

Much of the research on classroom culture and climate suggests that routines or rituals for thinking are a powerful way to engage students and support independent learners (Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison, 2011; Ritchhart 2015). You might have already learned about asking open-ended questions and giving wait time. I wonder, though, how instructors might move beyond just using questions to check for understanding or as a think-pair-share and begin to use questions as an intentional pedagogical practice to begin and end a class. Questions can effectively be used as a signpost within a lesson to support student learning and fuel the desire to know more (Bain, 2004; Berger, 2016).

At the Start of a Lesson - Essential Questions (McTighe and Wiggins, 2005)

- **What is an essential question?** An essential question frames a lesson topic or objective as an inquiry question. The question is broad enough so that each student could answer the question using a few examples from the class lesson.

- **Why use an essential question?** An essential question supports the instructor in focusing the lesson (depth vs. breadth) and allows students to know what they should be getting from each lesson. This question can be used as an assessment for the teacher to assess what students took away from the lesson. Also, the question serves as an assessment for the student as they should be able to answer the question using detailed examples from the lesson.

- **How to write an essential question?** To write an effective essential question, consider making the question learner-centered. In addition, consider how the question can move beyond recall and facts to focus on a process, analysis, or evaluation.

- **Some examples:** How does engagement impact learning? (A lesson in an education class.); How can I develop a thesis statement? (A lesson in a writing class.); What is the role of the arts in society? (A lesson in a visual arts class.)

At the End of a Lesson - Lingering Questions (adapted from TQE questioning method; Drama-Based Pedagogy)

- **What is a lingering question?** A lingering question gives a student something to think about deeply after engaging in the class lesson. Usually, this type of question connects to a student's life outside the classroom. The question is broad enough so that each student could answer the question in depth.

- **Why use a lingering question?** A lingering question allows students to reflect and synthesize

their new understanding at the end of a lesson. The question also focuses on personal relevance and can help a student understand the value of the content that was just presented.

- **How to write a lingering question?** Consider the students and their context in order to connect an aspect of the lesson to their major or life. Frame the connection as a question for students to think deeply about how the content is relevant to them as they move out of your classroom and into the world.

- **Some examples:** How does climate change impact your daily life? (At the end of a science lesson.); How is Harrisonburg impacted by global migration? (At the end of a history lesson.); Is there value in studying the "canon"? (At the end of a literature lesson.)

Learn More:

- *Asking Better Questions* by Morgan and Saxton (2006)

- *Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding* by McTighe and Wiggins (2013)

- *Asking Better Questions: Teaching and Learning for a Changing* World by Saxton, Miller, Laidlaw, O'Mara (2018)

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