

## When you ask *Big Questions*, are you:

### Emotional Support Domain

- Sitting close to the children?
- Making eye contact?
- Using respectful language?
- Matching the children's enthusiasm and enjoyment?
- Noticing any lack of understanding and/or difficulties?
- Providing individualized support and assistance?
- Helps in a timely manner?
- Helping children feel comfortable to participate?
- Incorporating children's ideas?
- Being flexible and following children's lead?
- Encouraging children to tell you their ideas and perspectives?

### Classroom Organization Domain

- Providing hands-on opportunities with interesting materials?
- Using a range of auditory, visual, and movement opportunities?
- Effectively expanding children's involvement?
- Explaining the lesson's objective to the children?
- Prepared, with all relevant materials easily accessible?
- Giving clear instructions so children know what to do?
- Giving children opportunities to be involved?
- Monitoring the classroom and children?
- Minimizing interruptions?

## When you ask *Big Questions*, are you:

### Instructional Support Domain

- Using open-ended questions to sustain back-and-forth exchanges?
- Adding follow up statements based on how the child responded (contingent responding)?
- Following up with how and why questions to push the children to explain their thinking?
- Encouraging children to predict, experiment, and evaluate?
- Giving opportunities for children to compare and classify objects?
- Letting children do their own problem solving?
- Having children brainstorm what they know about a topic?
- Inviting children to plan out the steps to complete the task?
- Setting up open-ended materials to focus on the process rather than the product?
- Connecting concepts with previous activities and the children's real world knowledge?
- Responding with additional information to expand or clarify what the child knows?
- Giving hints/assistance to help the child to figuring out the answer?
- Giving specific feedback so the child is encouraged to persist in finishing the activity?
- Encouraging children to talk to other children and share their ideas?
- Repeating the children's ideas back to them using more complex sentences?
- Introducing new vocabulary by relating it to words the children already know?
- Focused more on the process of learning than the final answer?

**Sort questions into Open- or Closed-Ended Questions:**

Should you fall like that? Isn't it dangerous?

What would happen if I didn't catch you?

Are you feeling okay?

How do you feel?

Does anyone have any questions?

What do you think?

Is this a circle?

What happens if we turn it upside down?

What color is this?

How did you make it?

What is it?

Tell me about what you see.

Is it a car?

How are you going to use it?

What shape is this?

Did you draw the same picture at home?

How many friends did you play with?

Tell me about playing with your friends.

Who fell?

Tell me about what happened.

How are you going to make it?

What's your idea?

Red, green, black. What's next?

What do you think will happen next?

Did you have a nice weekend?

Tell me about your weekend.

Who likes to eat popcorn?  
popcorn?

Why do you like to eat

Do you want to cut it by yourself?

What color do you want?

What else could you use?

Can you tell me more about why you did it this way?

| Close-Ended Questions   | Open-Ended Questions  |
|---|---|
| <p>1. How many times did you visit the doctor last year?</p> <p>2. Did you experience any side effects from the medication?</p> <p>3. How often do you take your medicine?</p> <p>4. How long did your illness last?</p> <p>5. How many people in your family have had this illness?</p> <p>6. How many times did you miss work because of your illness?</p> <p>7. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>8. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>9. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>10. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>11. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>12. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>13. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>14. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> <p>15. How many times did you visit the doctor?</p> | <p>1. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>2. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>3. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>4. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>5. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>6. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>7. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>8. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>9. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>10. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>11. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>12. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>13. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>14. How do you feel about your illness?</p> <p>15. How do you feel about your illness?</p> |

## Mystery Bag

Goal: to encourage children to investigate, predict, expand their vocabulary, and explain their thinking

### How-to:

1. Put one item into the bag.
2. Show children the bag and tell them, "This is a mystery bag."
3. Allow them to interact with the bag (look at, feel, reach into) in order to guess what is inside
4. Prompt them to guess and to explain their reasoning with questions such as:
  - What do you think is inside?
  - Describe what you feel.
  - Why did you guess it was a.....?
  - Have you ever felt anything like that before?
  - What do you think you can do with it?
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

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  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_
  - \_\_\_\_\_

**Our "Shoe" Questions**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 1 – Remember</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where did you buy your shoes?</li> <li>• Tell me the color of your shoes/what color are your shoes?</li> <li>• What kind of shoes are you wearing?</li> <li>• Is the toe pointy?</li> <li>• How many shoes do you see?</li> <li>• What size is this shoe?</li> <li>• What is this (point to shoe)?</li> <li>• How many shoes do you have?</li> <li>• Are your shoes big or small?</li> </ul>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 2 – Understand</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell me about your shoes/can you describe your shoes for me?</li> <li>• What do your shoes look like?</li> <li>• When would you wear flip flops?</li> <li>• What does your shoe feel like?</li> </ul>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 3 – Apply</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what kind of weather would you wear these shoes?</li> <li>• What can you do when you wear these shoes?</li> <li>• Why do we wear shoes?</li> <li>• Where have you seen people wearing shoes like these?</li> <li>• When could you wear these shoes?</li> <li>• Why are flip flops good for the beach?</li> <li>• Where could you go when you need shoes?</li> </ul>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 4 – Analyze</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are your shoes like my shoes?</li> <li>• How are your shoes different from my shoes?</li> <li>• Which shoe do you think would be more comfortable?</li> <li>• Where do you go to buy shoes?</li> <li>• What would happen if you switched shoes with me?</li> <li>• Will these shoes help you run fast or slow? Let's try it out and see.</li> </ul>                              |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 5 - Evaluate</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why did you wear these shoes today?</li> <li>• Do you like these shoes? Why/why not?</li> <li>• If you could change shoes, what would you wear instead? Why?</li> <li>• How do you feel when you wear these shoes?</li> <li>• Would these shoes be better for playing inside or outside? Why?</li> <li>• Would you wear these shoes at the beach/in the snow? Why/why not?</li> <li>• What are your favorite kind of shoes? Why?</li> <li>• Would you buy these shoes for yourself? Why/why not?</li> <li>•</li> </ul> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 6 - Create</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you change the design of your shoes? Show me.</li> <li>• If you could create your new favorite pair of shoes, what would they be like?</li> <li>• Write a story about how you might spend a day wearing these water shoes.</li> <li>• How can we use these shoe boxes to make shoes for ourselves?</li> <li>• What could we use to make shoes for our baby doll?</li> </ul> |

## Big Questions for Young Minds assignment: Read-Aloud

Before you practice using Big Questions during your read aloud of Perfect Square, You Are (Not) Small, or Duck! Rabbit!, please read pages 57-61 in Big Questions for Young Minds.

***This Read-Aloud section reminds us to read the story multiple times:***

- First read-aloud should be completed without teacher questioning (you are welcome to answer children's questions if they come up)
- Second read-aloud is when you start asking questions
  - Use the lower level (1-2) questions to reinforce any new vocabulary from the book
  - Use the higher level (3-6) questions to check for comprehension and encourage critical thinking
  - Ask questions before, during, and after you read the book to help with language & vocabulary development, comprehension, phonological awareness, and print concepts.
  - Consider the story elements:
    - Setting (where and when story takes place)
    - Characters (Who is the story about)
    - Theme (what the story is about)
    - Plot (What happens in the story)
    - Resolution (How does the story end)
- During any additional read-aloud sessions you should pose new and different higher level questions (avoid repeating the same questions during each read)

***Keep in mind:***

- The questions and ideas from this section of Big Questions for Young Minds can work for both fiction and informational books—they both have a story structure
- The most important thing is to find a high quality picture book to read
  - Try to find books that interest children based on what is important to them in their real world (new baby in family, moving homes, family member is sick, transitioning to a new school, etc.) or from curriculum studies
- Successful teacher/child interactions as you ask Big Questions should feel like a natural conversation with back-and-forth exchanges
  - Look for moments to respond to children contingently (reply back by connecting with or giving feedback on something the child said) rather than quizzing children by asking question after question

**Getting Started:**

- Think about how you want to read the story—individual, small group, whole group
- Highlight meaningful vocabulary words in context in the story, and define this novel vocabulary with words children are already familiar with
- Spend time preparing questions (using the Read-Aloud Planning Form) for the higher level questions 3-6
- Consider preparing an extension of the read-aloud allowing the children to 6) Create!
  - Think of questions to incorporate the origami paper to encourage children to Create with Perfect Square

**You can get additional ideas on forming questions on page 60-61 under sections “Supporting Children’s Learning” and “Expanding Children’s Thinking and Learning by Asking Questions”.**

To help with brainstorming your own questions, here are some example questions we thought of for each level of questioning when reading Perfect Square:

1. Remember
  - What shape was this book about?
2. Understand
  - How did the square feel at the beginning of the story?
3. Apply
  - Why do you think the square turned into a window at the end?
4. Analyze
  - How was the square different at the beginning of this story than at the end? Why?
5. Evaluate
  - What was your favorite thing the square changed into? Why?
6. Create
  - Take a piece of square origami paper and make it into something totally new.

Have fun reading with your children! We are excited to hear your feedback when we meet again on Wednesday, July 11 at 7pm.

## Center/Routine:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>1. Remember</b> (identify, name, count, repeat, recall)        | <b>2. Understand</b> (describe, discuss, explain, summarize)               |
| <b>3. Apply</b> (explain why, dramatize, identify with/relate to) | <b>4. Analyze</b> (recognize change, experiment, infer, compare, contrast) |
| <b>5. Evaluate</b> (express opinion, judge, defend/criticize)     | <b>6. Create</b> (make, construct, design, author)                         |

How can you change your questioning if the child is not yet ready for the highest levels?

# Lesson Planning Sheet

Topic of Study

|   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| <b>Learning Objectives</b> (align with standards or benchmarks) | <b>Vocabulary</b> |
|---|-------------------|

|   |                      |                          |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Blocks</b>                           | <b>Dramatic Play</b> | <b>Science/Discovery</b> |
| <b>Story Time/Language and Literacy</b> | <b>Art</b>           | <b>Small Groups</b>      |

What questions might you ask?

**Objective/Topic of Study:** \_\_\_\_\_

|                                     |                   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Related Standards/Benchmarks</b> | <b>Vocabulary</b> |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| <b>Mealtime</b> | <b>Transitions</b> |
|-----------------|--------------------|

|                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Large Motor</b> | <b>Outdoors</b> |
|--------------------|-----------------|

|  |  |
|--|--|
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|--|--|

|  |  |
|--|--|
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|--|--|

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>5. Evaluate</b> (express opinion, judge, defend/criticize) | <b>6. Create</b> (make, construct, design, author) |
|---|--|

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|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1. Remember</b> (identify, name, count, repeat, recall)         | <b>2. Understand</b> (describe, discuss, explain, summarize)               |
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Notes:

# Conversation with Lisa Mufson Bresson

Author of *Big Questions for Young Minds*

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**Q:** When you ask a question that the child should know the answer to, but doesn't answer appropriately, what can you do?

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**A:** If the question has a right answer, particularly a lower level content question, children can be eager or reluctant to answer based on how they feel you might react. It really depends on their knowledge, but it could also be that they aren't interested in answering it. You could build on their knowledge or ask it another way. If you are asking, "what shape is this?" and you feel that they should know the answer, you could instead ask, "can you find other shapes like this in the room?" That could be another way to test their knowledge.

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**Q:** Can close-ended questions help children with critical thinking?

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**A:** Close-ended questions help children develop the content knowledge they need to continue their thinking. It is important to remember that most three-year-olds, for instance, are very concrete - they have a very hard time holding abstract thought in their heads. That really starts to develop in the preschool years. So close-ended questions don't directly help with critical thinking, but they do help them build vocabulary and a solid concept of what the item is in their minds. Even colors are relatively abstract - calling something "blue" could really be different shades of turquoise and sky and cerulean and navy. Expand on that kind of element and think about building the knowledge.

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## Important note about infants and toddlers:

When looking at levels, the goal is not to get the children to the highest level on the chart, but rather to get to a higher level than they were before. A level two might be a very high level question for a child. If the child can answer level one questions like "what color is this paper?" or "what shape is this paper?" then moving up to a level two "tell me about this paper" requires them to call on all of this knowledge and vocabulary that you've given them in a new way. For that child, a level two question is a higher level question for them, a step up! So if you have children for a full year, at the start they are only able to describe things concretely, they are not abstract thinkers yet - developmentally the abstract thinking isn't there. Focus on bringing them up to a higher level for them.

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**Case Study – a specific example:** *We work in a center based room with four- and five-year-olds, and we will be getting a new child next week who tends to be very active and disruptive during large group time. We have been told that teachers have tried to give him something sensory to hold, push him to answer tougher questions (in case his activity stems from boredom), and we keep hearing "it just doesn't work." We want him to be more engaged and have more advanced language and be comfortable with us, we don't want to be stern. But his previous teachers tell us that when told to clean up, he runs around. For him, it is a joke. When he slaps kids, for him, it is a joke. How can we use questions to engage him and keep him from being disruptive? We want a strategy to get him on the same page as his peers, without spending so much time on him that other children slip through.*

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**A:** When there is a child who has a sensory appetite that they need to fill, when it's time to sit sometimes just the prospect of that sitting makes them riddled with anxiety. Look at the environment first. Is it overstimulating? Is it set up such that it doesn't promote misuse of materials? For some kids, it is very overwhelming to them. When you sit in the middle of the classroom, at their level, think about how much there is to look at and if it might be overstimulating. Sometimes you do need to make accommodations for kids. I had a kid who was really challenging during group time, we gave him items to help him with that sensory need. We would let him take a break at the other corner of the classroom and he would just jump around for 15 minutes but he was listening and he was watching. Sometimes he needed to roll on the floor but he was paying attention. For him, sitting for longer than four minutes was just too far beyond what he could do. Giving him space to move without disrupting his peers gave him the chance to focus on listening rather than focusing on trying to sit still. Some people might say "he isn't going to be ready for kindergarten if you let him do that." Well, this is not kindergarten; children shouldn't be ready for it yet. Children should be exposed to these different expectations in preschool, but they should be expected to meet these behavioral requirements consistently for the duration expected in kindergarten.

If this particular child has pretty good verbal language skills, ask him about his favorite things. This is a good way to get to know him, to determine his preferences, and to build a relationship with him. Just remember that when you find out what his favorite thing is, don't use it against him. Like, if his favorite thing is vehicles, don't say "if you can't sit in circle then I'm not going to let you play with cars. Use the favorites to

develop a relationship with him. It sounds like he has a lot of cognitive ability there, so asking him what he likes best might be the ticket.

In the chapter about class meetings we talk about group problem solving. If this child does have a hard time with his peers, it's important to make sure that those relationships are healthy. These children are always being called out and disrupting, and they feel that on a personal level. He is going to do things that will isolate him from his peers, he will be singled out for his bad behavior, and this can become a downward spiral. These whole group questioning strategies could really help. Problem solving in whole groups is a craft, you have to be careful not to single anybody out. You might use a lot of self-talk to really spell out a process a child might be going through when that child kicks something.

Kids don't cry to make us angry. Try some self-talk and pretend you are a kid who wants to knock down a building, and let the whole class know the thought process there. I've had children like that they do things and then they hear my explanation and go "ohhh!" They don't know why they did it. He did it, and now there's anxiety, and everyone is mad at him, and he doesn't know why, and there's a downward spiral.

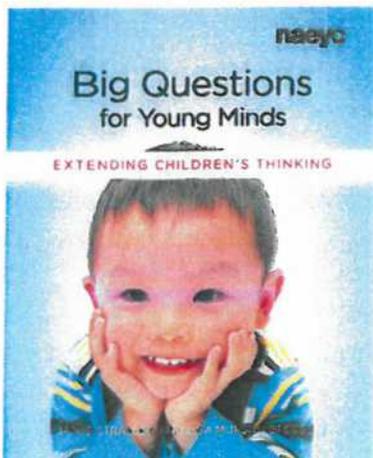
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**Q:** *How can you maintain interest in a whole group setting when you have some children who can answer deeper questions and others who are more at a level one?*

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**A:** Asking those bigger questions when you know there are some children who are interested is still ok, even if they are not the majority. Not every child is going to be able to answer, but even just listening to the process of asking and answering and that back and forth, just the exposure is helping them along. They may be thinking about the answer and just aren't ready to answer it yet. Don't hold off until every child is able to answer everything, because it is likely that not every child will be able to answer everything! For those working at lower levels, target them during smaller groups to ask them questions at their level, and encourage the children to ask each other questions! Some children won't know how to do it, while for some it's natural. So much depends on the child's exposure to conversation, and how much they are spoken to at home. Definitely don't NOT ask them the high level questions. When working with a wide range of developmental

levels in your classroom, including dual language learners who often have mixed stages, you have to think about differentiated instruction. Often when you talk about "differentiated instruction" you think about how to reach the children who are developmentally lower than the average for your group, but we cannot forget about those kids who are at a higher level too! If you have children who are engaged, don't give that up!



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## Final note about levels of questioning:

"During a recent discussion, a preschool teacher asked about a child who cannot sequence. She said that this child can answer incredibly creative questions and talk for hours, but cannot answer "first, next, last" questions about a book they have just read. We all have different learning styles, even as adults. You may find as you are creating these questions that you gravitate towards some kinds of questions more than others, and that's totally natural. For this child, she may have a harder time with linear thinking. I myself do not have a math brain, I have a creative brain, so I get it: some brains just work that way. Children don't necessarily progress up the steps one at a time, they will have strengths and weaknesses. For this child that cannot sequence, if you close the book and say "tell me what happened" and they can't do it, you can use the book as a concrete tool to scaffold their answer. If the child cannot remember, they can use the illustrations as a concrete support. You have kids who will tell you stories all day long but can't remember the stories they just heard, so building up their ability with concrete supports could really make a difference for their development."

## When you ask *Big Questions*, are you:

### Emotional Support

- Sitting close to the children?
- Making eye contact?
- Matching their enthusiasm?
- Following their lead?
- Providing timely, individualized support?

### Classroom Organization

- Prepared for the lesson?
- Giving clear instructions?
- Using a range of instruction: auditory, visual, movement?
- Minimizing interruptions?
- Monitoring the classroom?

### Instructional Support

- Repeating and extending the children's answers?
- Asking follow up questions based on their responses?
- Sustaining back-and-forth conversations?
- Encouraging them to experiment and problem solve?
- Asking them to evaluate results and explain their process?
- Connecting concepts to previous activities and experiences?
- Focusing on process over product?
- Introducing new vocabulary purposefully?