

40

Literacy Focus

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Before Reading	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fluency
<input type="checkbox"/>	During Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Comprehension
<input type="checkbox"/>	After Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vocabulary
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Writing
		<input type="checkbox"/>	Oral Language

Student Questions for Purposeful Learning

All middle and high school teachers hope to develop students' abilities to read, listen, and learn with a purpose. Purposeful learning is associated with higher levels of engagement and achievement (Ediger & Pavlik, 1999; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998). It leads to focused and sustained attention (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), and it enlivens classroom lessons. Student questions for purposeful learning, or SQPL, is a strategy designed to gain and hold students' interest in the material by having them ask and answer their own questions. When students instead of the teacher or text pose questions about what is to be learned, they become much more motivated to pay close attention to the information source for answers to their questions. Although SQPL begins with a teacher prompt to stimulate student questions, the process can become internalized so that students can begin to ask and answer questions on their own over content they must learn. SQPL legitimizes students' own questions as vehicles for learning. Instead of being interrogated, they become interrogators exploring information and ideas with purpose and with heightened attention.

STEP-BY-STEP

The steps involved in an SQPL lesson are as follows:

1. Look over the material to be read and covered in the day's lesson. Think up a statement related to the material that would cause students to wonder, challenge, and question. The statement does not have to be factually true as long as it provokes interest and curiosity. See Figure 40.1 for examples of question-provoking statements for various disciplinary topics.
2. Present the statement to students. Most often teachers write the statement on the board, though it can also be projected on the overhead or from a computer, put on a handout, and even stated orally for students to record in their notebooks.
3. Have students pair up and, based on the statement, generate two or three questions they would like answered. The questions must be related to the statement and should not be purposely farfetched or parodies.
4. When all student pairs have thought of their questions, ask someone from each team to share questions with the whole class.
5. As students ask their questions aloud, write them on the board. Eventually, similar questions will be asked by more than one pair. These should be starred or highlighted in some way.

Figure 40.1 Sample SQPL Question-Provoking Statements for Disciplinary Topics

English

Topic: Courtroom chapters in *To Kill a Mockingbird*

SQPL Statement: *Atticus is wasting his time defending Tom.*

Math

Topic: Measuring three-dimensional objects

SQPL Statement: *With just a ruler I can tell you the total distance around the Earth.*

History

Topic: Communism in post-WWII Europe

SQPL Statement: *People are happiest when government takes care of all their needs, and everyone is equal.*

6. Once all questions have been shared, look over the student-generated list and decide whether you need to add some questions of your own. This may be necessary when students have failed to ask about important information you want to be sure they learn. Tell students you thought up some questions, too, and would like to add them to the list.
7. At this point, students will be ready for the information source so they can seek answers to their questions. Tell them as they read or listen to pay attention to information that helps answer a question from the board. They should be especially focused on material related to the questions that were starred. These might be considered class consensus questions.
8. As content is covered, stop periodically and have students discuss with their partners which questions could be answered; then ask for volunteers to share.
9. Students might be required to record the questions from the board and the answers they find in their notebooks for later study.

APPLICATION AND EXAMPLES

*It's only a matter of time before Earth
will be hit by a large object from outer space.*

A seventh-grade science teacher wrote these words on the board for his class. He then asked his students to find a partner and think of three questions they would like answered about this statement. The teacher knew he had piqued curiosity when even his most reluctant student began talking excitedly about the explosion such a calamitous event would cause. Afterward, he gathered questions from the class and wrote them on the board. He placed a star next to the ones that were similar in order to highlight common themes of interest among class members. For example, several pairs of students wanted to know what kind of object would strike Earth; many others were interested in finding out what would happen as a result of such a collision; still others asked whether an object could be stopped. Once all students' questions were solicited they were eager to have answers.

At this stage, the students were ready for the presentation of the information. SQPL is adaptable to virtually any information source—such as lecture, discussion, video, the Internet, and printed text—the science teacher used. He told the class to read the section in their science books about asteroids, searching for answers to their own questions and recording them in their notebooks. He stopped the class periodically to discuss answers to students' questions.

The teacher has found that even when he demands students' attention, he's never completely sure they are doing so because it is so easy to create the illusion of attentiveness. His students are more likely to pay attention to the reading material, lectures, and other information

114 Chapter 40

sources in class when they are brought into the flow of instruction with engaging learning strategies. SQPL is one of several ways he accomplishes this. By striving to maximize student engagement and expand meaningful learning the teacher finds less mock participation and more genuine attentiveness.

References

- Ediger, A., & Pavlik, C. (1999). *Reading connections: Skills and strategies for purposeful reading*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Guthrie J., & Wigfield, A. (2000). Engagement and motivation in reading. In M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (2002), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3, pp. 403–422). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Schunk, D. H., & Zimmerman, B. J. (1998). *Self-regulated learning from teaching to self-reflective practice*. New York: Guilford Press.