

Sample Essential Questions

Math

How can you represent the same number in different ways? How does that help you?

History

Who were the “winners” and the “losers” in the 19th century European scramble for Africa?

To what extent should people go to protect their interests?

Was 19th century European Imperialism justified?

What does it mean to be “civilized?”

Are all men created equal?

Are some types of civilization inherently better than others?

Chaos & Order

What is the importance of civilization and what factors support or destroy its fabric?

What are the positive and negative aspects of both chaos and order?

What are the responsibilities and consequences of this new world order described as "global"?

What role does chaos play in the creative process?

What are the politics and consequences of war, and how do these vary based on an individual or cultural perspective?

Constructing Identities

How do we form and shape our identities?

How do we define who we are?

What can you learn about yourself by studying the lives of others?

How does what others think about you affect how you think about yourself?

What turning points determine our individual pathways to adulthood?

In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?

Creation

What is creativity and what is its importance for the individual / the culture?

What is art and its function in our lives?

Does a culture / community / institution have the right to censor its artists?

Freedom and Responsibility

What is freedom?

Is freedom ever free?

What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility?

What are the essential liberties?

Is liberty and justice for all attainable?

Should people sacrifice freedom in the interest of security?

When does government have the right to restrict the freedoms of people?

When is the restriction of freedom a good thing?

What sacrifices should people make for freedom?

Good and Evil

Is humankind inherently good or evil?

Have the forces of good and evil changed over time and if so, how?

What is the function of human will in relationship between good and evil?

How do different cultures shape the definitions of good and evil?

Heroes and "Sheroes"

Do the attributes of a hero remain the same over time?

When does a positive personality trait become a tragic flaw?

What is the role of a hero or "sheroe" (coined by Maya Angelou) in a culture?

How do various cultures reward / recognize their heroes and sheroes?

Why is it important for people and cultures to construct narratives about their experience?

What is the relevance of studying multicultural texts?

How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?

In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?

Adversity /Human Condition

In the face of adversity, what causes some people to prevail while others fail?

What is the meaning of life?

What is the meaning of life and does that shape our beliefs regarding death?

Are we governed/guided by fate, free will, a greater power, or do we fall somewhere on the spectrum between?

Illusion and Reality

What is reality and how is it constructed?

What tools can the individual use to judge the difference, or draw a line between, illusion and reality?

What are the potential conflicts when one person's reality is another person's illusion?

How can we ever truly be certain of our reality?

Language

How is our understanding of culture and society constructed through and by language?

How can language be powerful?

How can you use language to empower yourself?

How is language used to manipulate us?

In what ways are language and power inseparable?

Is it possible to have culture without language?

Is it possible to think without language?

How does language influence the way we think, act, and perceive the world?

How do authors use the resources of language to impact an audience?

Literature

How is literature like life?

What is literature supposed to do?

What influences a writer to create?

What is the purpose and function of art in our culture?

How does literature reveal the values of a given culture or time period?

How does the study of fiction and nonfiction texts help individuals construct their understanding of reality?

In what ways are all narratives influenced by bias and perspective?

Where does the meaning of a text reside? Within the text, within the reader, or in the transaction that occurs between them?

Can a reader infer an author's intentions based on the text?

What are enduring questions and conflicts that writers (and their cultures) grappled with hundreds of years ago and are still relevant today?

How do we gauge the optimism or pessimism of a particular time period or particular group of writers?

Are there universal themes in literature that are of interest or concern to all cultures and societies?

What are the characteristics or elements that cause a piece of literature to endure?

What distinguishes a good read from great literature?

Who decides the criteria for judging whether or not a book is any good?

What is the purpose of: science fiction? Satire? Historical novels, etc.?

Love and Sacrifice

What is love?

Does love require sacrifice?

What is the relationship between love and trust or between love and loyalty?

What are the boundaries of love and sacrifice, and where does one draw the line between them?

What are the factors that move individuals, communities, or nations to great sacrifice and what are the consequences?

Nature and man

What are the responsibilities of the individual and/or society in regard to the health of the environment?

How do different world views lead to different views toward nature?

Why has nature inspired so many artists over time?

Our World View

How do we know what we know?

How does what we know about the world shape the way we view ourselves?

How do our personal experiences shape our view of others?

What does it mean to be an insider or an outsider?

What does it mean to "grow up"?

Do you believe that things are fated no matter what, or do you believe your actions can change the course of your life?

Have the forces of good and evil changed over time?

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