

A Guide to
Creative
Questioning
for
Elementary-Grade
Literature

Grades 5-6

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The books in this volume are arranged alphabetically by author, with Royal Fireworks publications clustered at the end in chronological order.

Introduction

The purpose of the *Guide to Creative Questioning* series is to provide a framework to question children and teens about their reading in a way that encourages and promotes higher-order thinking. Children's literature provides a rich trove of ideas and themes that can be discussed and explored, and that process can lead young readers to develop broader knowledge, generate informed opinions, and wonder about new ideas.

When we ask students questions about what they have read, listen to their answers, and engage them in conversations based on those answers, we promote the exchange and exploration of ideas, whether those students are our own children or those assigned to us in a classroom. Good questions lead to positive thinking experiences and diverse, interesting answers. Through active questioning and discussion, students can play with ideas, discover relationships, and relate new information with old concepts. As such, it is useful to have a framework on which to fashion a pattern of questioning and discussion based on specific works of literature that a student has read.

Enter Bloom's Taxonomy. In 1956 Benjamin Bloom published his *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* in which he presented a classification of educational objectives related to six major cognitive operations: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The original purpose of the taxonomy was to help improve the exchange of ideas among test makers and others in the fields of educational research and curriculum development, but it wasn't long before

educators were using it to guide their students in the cumulative process of learning.

The taxonomy is structured to progress from the simplest level of knowledge to the more complex thinking levels of synthesis and evaluation. Most educators agree that the upper four levels of the taxonomy—application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation—represent the higher-order thinking processes, requiring students to engage in increasingly complex, sophisticated, and abstract thinking.

The Taxonomy Revised

As more and more members of the educational community referred to the taxonomy, it became apparent that its usefulness was somewhat constrained. Educators needed a way to tie it more concretely to what they were teaching in the classroom. So in 2001, after consulting with educational psychologists, curriculum experts, and others, Lorin W. Anderson (a former student of Bloom's) and David R. Krathwohl (Bloom's partner in his original taxonomy work) published *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. The revised taxonomy is based on Bloom's original educational objectives—progressing in complexity, as the original had—while identifying specific cognitive tasks that students must be able to perform at each level.

Level 1, Knowledge, became Remembering; Level 2, Comprehension, became Understanding; Level 3, Application, became Applying; Level 4, Analysis, became Analyzing. Levels 5 and 6, Synthesis and Evaluation, were looked at more critically in terms of the difficulty of skills and were switched so that Level 6,

Evaluation, became Level 5, Evaluating, and Level 5, Synthesis, became Level 6, Creating. The argument was that synthesis entails all of the thinking processes, including decision making, designing, redesigning, imagining, constructing, composing, and creating.

Remembering calls upon recall or memory of material as it was presented. Understanding calls upon memory of the material plus interpretation of its meaning. Applying means using the learned material in a new situation. Analyzing involves examining the learned material, breaking it into its distinguishable parts, and exploring their relationships. Evaluating requires being judgmental using criteria and standards. Creating entails planning and reorganizing known elements into something new or evolving a completely new idea.

BLOOM'S TAXONOMY	REVISED TAXONOMY
Evaluation	Creating
Synthesis	Evaluating
Analysis	Analyzing
Application	Applying
Comprehension	Understanding
Knowledge	Remembering

The Summer of the Swans

by Betsy Byars, 1970

Sara's younger brother Charlie, who is mentally challenged, has been missing all day, so Sara sets out to find him. In the process, she must confront her self-absorption and discover what truly matters to her.

Level 1 (Remembering)

- Why do Sara, Charlie, and Wanda live with Aunt Willie?
- What does Sara take Charlie to see?
- How is Charlie found?
- Who calls Sara after Charlie is found?

Level 2 (Understanding)

- Why can't Charlie speak?
- Why doesn't Sara get along with her sister Wanda?
- Why is Sara's fourteenth summer "the worst summer of her life"?
- Why don't Sara and her siblings see her father very often?

Level 3 (Applying)

- What would you have done if you had discovered that Charlie was missing?
- What would you have said to Sara during the early part of the story about her negative attitude?
- Does an older sister have a different role to play than an older brother? Explain your answer.
- Imagine that Charlie could speak for one day. What would you like to talk with him about?

Level 4 (Analyzing)

- Aunt Willie thinks Sara and Wanda look just alike. Why does Sara think Wanda is so much prettier?
- How do you think Aunt Willie feels about having to take care of her brother's children? What evidence from the story makes you think so?
- Describe Sara's relationship with Charlie. Does it change from the beginning of the story to the end? If so, how?
- Is self-criticism a positive or a negative attribute to have? Explain your reasoning.

Level 5 (Evaluating)

- Is Aunt Willie a good mother to the children? Why or why not?
- Do you think Sara becomes a better person when Charlie is lost? Explain.
- Is Wanda a good older sister to Sara and Charlie? Explain your reasoning.
- Do you believe that the family took effective steps to protect Charlie? Why or why not?

Level 6 (Creating)

- If Wanda were Sara's older brother instead of her sister, how would that change the story?
- How would the story be different if Charlie were a beautiful girl?
- What other event might have made Sara stop being so self-centered?
- Create another chapter of the story in which we learn what happens to Sara and Charlie five years later.