

A Guide to  
Creative  
Questioning  
for  
Middle-Grade  
Literature  
  
Grades 7-8

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*Royal Fireworks Press*  
Unionville, New York

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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.

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

## Where the Red Fern Grows

by *Wilson Rawls, 1961*

It takes twelve-year-old Billy two years to earn the fifty dollars he needs to buy two red coonhounds. Old Dan is strong, and Little Ann is smart; together they are a championship team. Billy has a loving and supportive family, but tragedy takes both of his dogs, and Billy must learn to accept the loss.

### ***Level 1 (Remembering)***

- Why does Billy name his puppies Dan and Ann?
- What does Billy buy for his family after he purchases the puppies?
- Why does Billy cut the Big Tree down?
- How do Old Dan and Little Ann die?

### ***Level 2 (Understanding)***

- Why do Old Dan and Little Ann attack Old Blue?
- Why does Mama want to move to town?
- What does Billy do that makes him feel better about Rubin?
- How does the legend of the red fern help Billy?

### ***Level 3 (Applying)***

- How important would it be for you to keep a promise to an animal? Explain.
- Billy gives his father money to compensate for not having to do chores. Would you be comfortable giving your parents money to do your chores? Why or why not?
- If you were Billy, what would you do when the dogs treed the mountain lion?
- Rawls's original title for this story was *The Hounds of Youth*. His publisher changed it to *Where the Red Fern Grows*. Which title do you prefer, and why?

#### ***Level 4 (Analyzing)***

- How does Billy know that Old Dan has brawn and Little Ann has brains?
- Why does Billy refuse to kill the ghost coon?
- Do you think Billy feels responsible for Rubin's death? Explain your answer.
- How is the mountain lion an example of foreshadowing in a novel?

#### ***Level 5 (Evaluating)***

- Was it necessary for Billy to cut down the Big Tree? Why or why not?
- Who has the most positive influence on Billy? Why do you think so?
- In the championship raccoon hunt, Old Dan and Little Ann tree the third raccoon until ice covers them. Do you think they are motivated in their determination by their devotion to Billy or by their love of the hunt? Explain.
- Do you think Old Dan would have been killed if Billy had not entered the fray in the fight against the mountain lion? Why or why not?

#### ***Level 6 (Creating)***

- How would the story be different if the character of Grandpa was left out?
- Suppose Billy had only purchased one dog. How would that change the story?
- How would the story change if Rubin hadn't died?
- Billy is moving to town; what will he do instead of hunt? Create an epilogue about his new life there.