

Probing Questions to Help Students Think Critically about Reading (may be used as tasks)

Questions which Probe Basic Understanding and Preparation

- Did you use a reading process? Describe your reading process.
- How did you pre-read the material? Explain.
- Have you determined the subject of this reading?
- What is the central idea or claim the author is trying to make?
- Are you able to identify the topic sentences and major support? Show me.
- Can you locate the minor details? Are they relevant?
- Have you outlined, mapped or taken notes on the reading?

Questions which Probe a Deeper Understanding

- Have you read this more than once? Have you annotated and marked your text?
- Why would it be a good idea to read more than once? To annotate? To mark your text?
- What is the author's purpose for writing this? Why?
- Who speaks in the essay? To whom does the author speak (audience)? What is the author's background?
- Select your favorite passage. Why did you select it? What does it mean and how does it relate to the author's thesis or central idea?
- Can you paraphrase the passage(s)? Put it in your own words. Cite it properly.
- Does the author directly state what his argument is, or is there an implied argument that remains unstated? Write down the argument.
- In your own words, how would you summarize the author's implied ideas and major points? Are there confusing parts? Show me.
- Describe the diction, sentence and paragraph structure in this reading. Point out the transitional phrases.
- Does the organization and structure make sense to you? Why?
- How have you tried to define unknown words? Have you examined the context in which the vocabulary word appears? Structure? Define unfamiliar words (includes denotative and connotative meanings)
- How do you remember concepts?
- What does the content mean to you?
- Where are you confused? Read it again and we will discuss it.
- Have you jotted down questions about what you don't understand?

Question which Probe Analytical and Critical Thinking

- Discuss your annotations, markings and questions. Describe why you selected what you did.
- Where have you responded to the content?
- Let's examine specific ideas or parts of text.
 - How does this passage anticipate what is to come?
 - How does this passage relate to what came before?
 - What do these passages reveal?
 - How does it reveal character, human nature, morality bias, etc?
 - How would you describe its tone? Why? Provide specific examples.
- Investigate the wording and references made to other parts of same text
- Explain the author's redundancies, assumptions, contradictions, inconsistencies, accentuations, nuances...
- How have you distinguished between fact and opinion?
- How have you deciphered relevant from irrelevant information?
- Recognize rhetorical modes and their purpose(organizational patterns)
- Is there a contextual significance (authorial, philosophical, subjective, historical, sociological, political, economic...)? Where? How do you know? Discuss and provide examples.
- Have you questioned the author's omissions and fallacies? With what do you disagree? Why?

- Is all of the information relevant or significant? Why or why not?
- Can you look at this idea another way? Another solution? Discuss many ways of thinking about a particular idea.
- Have you contemplated values, experiences and attitudes of the author. What are they? How do you know? How do they affect the work?
- Explain your own attitudes, biases and interests towards the subject matter.
- Create questions which debate meaning and contest author's ideas.
- How does this paragraph(s), passage, part relate to the whole?
- What are the broader implications? How does the author conclude? Why?
- How can you connect text to self and text to world?
- What relationships to you see among subjects? Themes?
- How and why do these things happen and what is left unanswered?
- Can you show how ideas are related? Synthesize information.
- Discuss actions to take, challenges, implications, changes.
- What predictions can readers make?
- Compare to other readings by same author or by different authors.
- Are there issues you would like to explore in greater detail
- Is the evidence valid? Why or why not?
- Discuss ways to evaluate sources of information
- Explore logic, rationale, emotion, morality, ethics, authority, larger social, economic, political or other circumstances of influence
- Are the author's ideas valuable? In what way?

Questions to Probe Syntopical Thinking (concept introduced by Mortimer Alder)

- Does the author's argument remind you of another work? How and why?
- Compare similar works.
- Have you observed data from various sources? What did you discover?
- How have you evaluated texts and evidence?
- Are your sources credible?