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|  | [Text Dependent Questions for ELLs](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2014/01/24/text-dependent-questions-for-ells/) by [Diane Staehr Fenner](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/author/dstaehrfenner/) |

In this week’s post, I’ll circle back to another theme from Tim Shanahan’s fascinating article called “[Letting the Text Take Center Stage](http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/Shanahan.pdf)” (American Educator, Fall 2013). As you may recall from my previous posts, Shanahan’s article explores the issues of background knowledge and text dependent questions (TDQs) as they relate to the Common Core.

Back in December, the article inspired me to write a post about the intersection between [background knowledge, the Common Core, and ELLs](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2013/12/12/determining-how-much-background-knowledge-to-provide-for-ells/). This time, I want to examine some ideas for using text dependent questions with ELLs. Since I’m a big fan of writing two-part blog posts, first I’ll outline some big picture issues in terms of what TDQs are and some considerations in writing TDQs for ELLs. Next week, I’ll share some sample TDQs for ELLs at different levels of English language proficiency based on authentic text. (If you have any TDQs you’d like to share, please send them to me at [Diane@DSFConsulting.net](mailto:Diane@DSFConsulting.net)!)

#### ****What TDQs Are****

The CCSS call for students to use texts to cite evidence in their claims and analyses. In order for them to do so, teachers will need to ask their students text dependent questions, or questions that cannot be answered without having read the text on which the questions are based. Text dependent questions do not rely on students' background knowledge or information that is extraneous to the text. This idea can be evaluated by giving students test questions without the text in order to see if they can correctly answer the questions (Tuinman, 1973). Text dependent questions help ensure students' comprehension of the text as well as help students focus on the text's academic vocabulary and sentence structures.

However, the CCSS also emphasize the need for text dependent questions to be relevant to the meaning of the text and not merely random questions based on the text. Shanahan (2013) explains that a quick glance at the types of text-dependent questions found on the Internet reveals that, although educators understand how to develop questions based on a specific text, they do not necessarily understand how to develop text-dependent questions that matter in terms of leading students to comprehend the layers of a text.

#### ****Criteria for Creating TDQs****

Shanahan shares two overarching criteria for creating TDQs in his article, which I’ve reframed into – what else – questions that you can ask yourself and colleagues.

**Q: Does the answer to the question depend on the text?**

A: Students must have to refer to the text, not their own background knowledge, to answer the TDQ. However, not all questions that depend on the text for their answer are important within each text. The CCSS emphasizes the text above everything else in discussions. Shanahan warns that discussions around TDQs should not turn into “quiz show trivia." For example, the question "What thing did the godmother turn into a coach?" from the Cinderella story certainly does refer to the text. However, the answer isn't that important for students to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

**Q: Is the question worth asking?**

A: This criterion is a bit more complicated. Shanahan uses the framework of the CCSS to help outline three types of TDQs that align to each of three [close readings](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2013/02/22/background-knowledge-a-key-to-close-reading-with-ells/) of a text. To him, well-drafted text-dependent questions require students not only to demonstrate their understanding of key ideas and details, but also to speak to the craft and structure of the text and demonstrate the ability to integrate knowledge and ideas.

1. In the first reading of the text, teachers should craft questions that focus on the key ideas and details from the text. They should focus on the important information that can only be determined through reading the text.
2. In the second reading of the text, teachers should write questions that hone in on the craft and structure of the text so students can further interpret the text. That is, they should develop questions that have students focus on such issues as how the text said what it said and how the author organized the information.
3. In the third reading of the text, TDQs should focus on the integration of knowledge and ideas. TDQs should serve to guide students to critically evaluate a text and can focus on such themes as the meaning of the text, the author’s point, and how this text’s ideas and approach compare with those of other texts.

**Criteria for creating TDQs for ELLs**

In doing a little research for this post, I came across some resources from Achieve the Core on [creating TDQs.](http://www.achievethecore.org/page/710/text-dependent-question-resources) However, I quickly noticed that these resources appear to be intended for native speakers of English. So, I adapted these guidelines to add some considerations for using them with emergent bilinguals and ELLs.

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| **Achieve the Core Guideline** | **ELL Interpretation/Suggestion** |
| Think about what you think is the most important learning to be drawn from the text. Note this as raw material for the culminating assignment and the focus point for other activities to build toward. | Depending on their level of English language proficiency, ELLs will need different amounts of scaffolding to comprehend the text on a deep level. ELLs may require some additional steps to get to this level of learning. |
| Determine the key ideas of the text.  Create a series of questions structured to bring the reader to an understanding of these. | ELLs might need to be provided some concise [background knowledge](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2013/12/12/determining-how-much-background-knowledge-to-provide-for-ells/) to access the key ideas of the text. TDQs will need to be scaffolded so that ELLs at different levels of English language proficiency can understand them. ELLs might need sentence frames or sentence starters to support their answers to the questions. |
| Locate the most powerful academic words in the text and integrate questions and discussions that explore their role into the set of questions above. | Teachers of ELLs will need to decide which academic words to teach ELLs. Some resources include Colorin Colorado’s [“Selecting Vocabulary Words to Teach ELLs”](http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/content/vocabulary/) and the University of Nottingham, New Zealand’s [Academic Word List Highlighter.](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/alzsh3/acvocab/index.htm) |
| Take stock of what standards are being addressed in the series of questions above. Then decide if any other standards are suited to being a focus for this text. If so, form questions that exercise those standards. | In addition to Common Core standards, English language proficiency/development standards will also need to guide the creation of TDQs. ESL teachers will need to [collaborate with content teachers](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2013/03/06/ells-are-everyones-kids-the-role-of-collaboration-in-the-ccss/) to help them integrate English language proficiency/development standards into their TDQs. |
| Consider if there are any other academic words that students would profit from focusing on. Build discussion planning or additional questions to focus attention on them. | Teachers of ELLs will need to decide which other academic words to teach ELLs. They must be careful not to teach too many words in the text or ELLs could become overwhelmed. |
| Find the sections of the text that will present the greatest difficulty and craft questions that support students in mastering these sections. These could be sections with difficult syntax, particularly dense information, and tricky transitions or places that offer a variety of possible inferences. | The sections of text that will present the greatest difficulty to ELLs may differ from those which will present the greatest difficulty for non-ELLs. Teachers should analyze the [academic language found in each text](http://www.colorincolorado.org/educators/academic/) and teach the academic language to the ELLs – as well as the non-ELLs. |
| Develop a culminating activity around the idea or learning identified in #1. A good task should reflect mastery of one or more of the standards, involve writing, and be structured to be done by students independently. | The culminating activity should incorporate CCSS as well as English language proficiency/development standards for ELLs. [Classroom-based assessments should be scaffolded](http://blog.colorincolorado.org/2013/09/06/instructional-suggestions-for-ells-parcc-assessment-task-part-2/) so that ELLs can demonstrate what they know and can do. In order for ELLs to take part in the task, they will need scaffolding in order to do so. The amount and type of scaffolding needed will depend on their level of English proficiency. |

I hope you've found this initial post on what TDQs are and some criteria for creating them for ELLs to be helpful. I look forward to sharing some examples of TDQs for ELLs next week. Please do take a look at any TDQs you've written or have seen that you think meet the criteria above, and send me samples for next week's post!

**TDQ Resources**

Achieve the Core: [Text-Dependent Question Resources](http://www.achievethecore.org/page/710/text-dependent-question-resources)

Shanahan, T. (2013). [Letting the text take center stage:](http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/fall2013/Shanahan.pdf) How the Common Core State Standards will transform English language arts instruction. *American Educator,* 37.

Tuinman, J. (1973). Determining the passage dependency of comprehension questions in 5 major tests. *Reading Research Quarterly,* 9(2), 206–223.