

Critical Questioning Method of Engaging with Texts

The critical questioning method invites students to engage with a text by generating a series of questions about it, beginning with simple questions of recall and moving to deeper questions of analysis, application, and synthesis. This method can be used with any text, although it yields the richest results when used with complex, primary sources.

In teaching students this method, it helps to have them practice with a text they are very familiar with. Then they can move on to work with a text that is new to them and directly relevant to the course content. The following examples use the *Cinderella* story:

Level 1

Level 1 encompasses questions that are basic matters of recall. The answers can be clearly and unambiguously found within the text itself. These questions often begin with *Who*, *What*, *When*, or *Where*. Examples of level 1 questions for *Cinderella* include:

- What were Cinderella's slippers made of?
- Who helped Cinderella to get ready for the ball?

Level 2

Level 2 includes questions that are more complex. The answers may be implied, but not directly stated, within the text. These questions often begin with *Why* or *How*. Examples of level 2 questions for *Cinderella* include:

- Why don't Cinderella's stepsisters like her?
- How did Cinderella get her name?

Level 3

Level 3 questions may not directly mention the text at all. Rather, they seek to surface larger, more universal issues that the text implies and examine the implications of those issues for life today. These questions often begin with *Why* or *To what extent*. Examples of level 3 questions for *Cinderella* include:

- Why are older women often portrayed as evil in fairy tales?
- To what extent is "happily ever after" a realistic goal for married couples?

