

# The Common Core Classroom



## Shift 4: Text-Based Answers

Students have rich and rigorous conversations which are dependent on students reading a central text.

Teachers ensure classroom experiences stay deeply connected to the text and that students develop habits for making evidentiary arguments based on the text, both in conversation as well as in writing, to assess their comprehension of a text.

As the name suggests, a text-dependent question specifically asks a question that **can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text being read**. It does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text nor depend on students having other experiences or knowledge; instead it privileges the *text itself and what students can extract from what is before them*.

### Non-Text Dependent Questions:

For example, in a close analytic reading of Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," the following would not be text-dependent questions:

- *Why did the North fight the Civil War?*
- *Have you ever been to a funeral or grave site?*
- *Lincoln says that the nation is dedicated to the proposition that "all men are created equal." Why is equality an important value to promote?*



The overarching problem with these questions is that [they require no familiarity at all with Lincoln’s speech in order to answer them](#). Responding to these sorts of questions instead [requires students to go outside the text](#). Such questions can be tempting to ask because they are likely to get students talking, but they take students away from considering the actual point Lincoln is making. **They seek to elicit a personal or general response that relies on individual experience and opinion, and answering them will not move students closer to understanding the text of the “Gettysburg Address.”**

## Text-Dependent Questions

Good text-specific questions will *often linger over specific phrases and sentences to ensure careful comprehension of the text*—they help students see something worthwhile that they would not have seen on a more cursory reading. Typical text-dependent questions ask students to perform one or more of the following tasks:

- Analyze paragraphs on a sentence-by-sentence basis and sentences on a word-by-word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases, or words
- Investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another
- Probe each argument in persuasive text, each idea in informational text, each key detail in literary text, and observe how these build to a whole
- Examine how shifts in the direction of an argument or explanation are achieved and the impact of those shifts
- Question why authors choose to begin and end when they do
- Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve
- Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated

### Non-Examples and Examples

Not Text-Dependent	Text-Dependent
In “Casey at the Bat,” Casey strikes out. Describe a time when you failed at something.	What makes Casey’s experiences at bat humorous?
In “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Dr. King discusses nonviolent protest. Discuss, in writing, a time when you wanted to fight against something that you felt was unfair.	What can you infer from King’s letter about the letter that he received?
In “The Gettysburg Address” Lincoln says the nation is dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Why is equality an important value to promote?	“The Gettysburg Address” mentions the year 1776. According to Lincoln’s speech, why is this year significant to the events described in the speech?

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Sources:

[achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org)

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