



3

**Use Questions:
Help Your Students
Connect
God's World and Word**

Part 3 of a 4-Part Series

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What can you do to get started using this kit?

- Look at the session guides, noting the title and goal of each session.
- Read "Session 1: Why use questions to help students connect God's world and Word?" (page 6) and "Reading 1: Use questions to help your students connect God's world and Word" (page 7).
- Read through the facilitator guides, especially "Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject" (page 2) and "Frequently asked questions" (page 4).

Use questions

To connect God's world and Word, your students need to think. Asking questions is an effective way to get your students to think and to make connections.

These 7 interactive sessions will help you...

1. Evaluate and improve your use of questions to help your students connect God's world and Word.
2. Analyze and explain why God asks questions.
3. Analyze and explain how questions help students connect God's world and Word.
4. Understand and apply the characteristics of good questions.
5. Document and then ask your students questions to help them connect God's world and Word.
6. Get your students to respond sincerely to the questions you ask.
7. Increase your commitment to using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word.

I would enjoy learning about how you are using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at [<learnmore@closethegapnow.org>](mailto:learnmore@closethegapnow.org).

—Michael B. Essenburg



Michael

I'm passionate about helping students connect God's world and Word.

Key ways to do this include targeting connections, using assessments, using questions, and meeting student learning needs.

Let's help each of our students connect God's world and Word in each subject

We want our students to connect God's world and Word. When 5th graders study health, we're excited to see them write things like, "The first step in being healthy is to have a good relationship with God." And when 10th graders study racism as portrayed in *Night* (a Holocaust memoir), we feel good to see them write things like, "I have no right to choose whether I should help or not; the day I chose to follow my consistent and loving God, I threw away the option of apathy."

What's our goal? To have each of our students proficiently connect God's world and Word in each subject.

What helps teachers achieve this goal? Having their learning needs met, for example:

1. Getting support, encouragement, and accountability.
2. Experiencing engaging instruction.
3. Having time to reflect on the importance of helping students make connections and on how to help students make connections.
4. Having concrete examples of how students are connecting God's world and Word. And having concrete examples of how other teachers help their students connect God's world and Word.
5. Having repeated opportunities to apply their learning.

These materials (part of a 4-part series) are designed to help teachers achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. In each session (suggested length of 60 minutes), teachers will:

1. Support each other as they report on progress they've made on their action steps.
2. Read about and discuss a key question like "What do you want your students to learn?"
3. Commit to action steps they will take before the next session in order to help students connect God's world and Word.
4. Pray for each other.

What helps administrators achieve this goal? Being able to provide professional development that results in each teacher helping each student to connect God's world and Word. And being able to provide professional development that is cost-effective, easy to set up, easy to facilitate, and aligned with accreditation standards.

These materials are designed to help administrators achieve the goal of having each student connect God's world and Word in each subject. To use these materials, no outside expert needs to be called in. Instead, an administrator or a classroom teacher can serve as facilitator. To use these materials, no extensive preparation is required—the facilitator can just review the materials, make copies of the session guide and reading, and use the guide to help participants move through the session. And to use these materials, no big blocks of time have to be set aside. Instead, smaller blocks of time (say, 60 minutes) can be scheduled over several weeks.

Take action: Help each student proficiently connect God's world and Word. You can do this by reviewing the materials, using the assessment in Session 1 to determine which sessions to include, finding a facilitator, developing a schedule, and inviting teachers to participate.

What makes a good facilitator good?

A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, from beliefs about growth:

1. *God is growing His people, and the Holy Spirit is at work in each believer.* God is already at work in the lives of each of His people. While God may use me to help a person grow, it's God who is actually growing each of His people. As a facilitator, I encourage each person to listen to God.
2. *People want to grow and are empowered to grow by those who believe in them.* You and I both want to grow. And people who believe in us empower us to grow. I know this. I've experienced it in my own life. You have, too. When people believe in me, I can do more. As a facilitator, I believe in people. So, I listen (instead of talking), ask questions (instead of advising), and encourage (instead of critiquing). Remember, Barnabas believed in Paul.
3. *Growing is more about motivation than information.* We all know good things that would help us grow. We know we should do these good things—but we don't. Simply put, knowing doesn't equal doing. As a facilitator, I empower people to focus on good things they want to work on.
4. *People grow as they take responsibility by defining, committing to, and achieving goals.* So as a facilitator, I don't take the responsibility for defining goals; instead, I empower people to define their goals. I don't take the responsibility for committing to goals; instead, I empower people to commit to their goals. I don't take the responsibility for achieving the goals; instead, I empower people to achieve their goals. Make sense?

Based on these beliefs, a good facilitator uses key skills to help others grow:

1. *A good facilitator listens* (instead of talking). He gives his full attention to what others are saying, looks interested, sounds interested, and targets understanding (not judging). He listens a minimum of 80% of the time.
2. *A good facilitator inquires to provoke reflection* (instead of advising). He asks questions ("What helps students make connections?"), makes inviting statements ("Tell me more about...."), and recognizes that effective inquiry means that others talk at least 80% of the time.
3. *A good facilitator focuses others* on achieving the session goal and on determining and achieving their own action steps (instead of suggesting action steps).
4. *A good facilitator encourages others* (instead of critiquing). He does this by asking for clarification ("What do you mean by...?"), by giving affirmation, and by restating things ("So, you're saying....").

Finally, a good facilitator prepares. Before each session, he makes sure he understands the significance of the session title and the goal, familiarizes himself with the session content, determines the length of the session (I suggest 60 minutes), makes photocopies and room arrangements, and develops a facilitation plan (see page 4).

So, what makes a good facilitator good? A good facilitator facilitates from his heart, uses key skills, and prepares. Why? In order to empower participants to take action to help their students connect God's world and Word.

Take action: Find ways to provide more effective facilitation. You can do this by assessing how you're doing as a facilitator, talking with a colleague, and determining 2 action steps you will take.

Frequently asked questions

- 1. What's the thinking behind the sequence of the sessions?**
Session 1 provides an overview and includes a self-assessment. Sessions 2-6 unpack the self-assessment in Session 1. Session 7 targets commitment.
- 2. Do participants need to do the sessions in order?**
Generally speaking, sessions should be completed in order. But the bottom line is to do the sessions in whatever order helps participants help students connect God's world and Word.
- 3. Do participants need to do all sessions?**
No. Participants only need to do the sessions that help them move forward on helping students connect the part of God's world they study and God's Word. If the self-assessment data from Session 1 indicates that participants don't need to complete a given session, then consider skipping that session.
- 4. What's the recommended number of participants?**
You need enough participants to have good interaction and not so many that it feels impersonal. The number of participants could be from 2 to 20. I recommend 6 or more.
- 5. How long should each session be?**
As long as it takes for participants to report on previous action steps, reflect on the session goal, and commit to new action steps that target the session goal. I suggest 60 minutes per session. Here's a sample schedule for a 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).
- 6. How much time should there be between sessions?**
Enough time for participants to carry out their action steps. I suggest one week.
- 7. What's the thinking behind the structure of the session guides?**
The structure is designed to help teachers apply what they learn. Teachers move from reporting on action steps, to learning, to committing to action. The structure works well for professional learning communities.
- 8. What modifications can the facilitator make to the session guides?**
The facilitator can make whatever modifications will help participants move forward on helping students connect God's world and Word. For example, the facilitator can delete questions, include an additional reading, or show a video.
- 9. What's the thinking behind the sequence of discussion questions in the session guides?**
The discussion questions follow a set sequence. The questions start with facts, move to feelings and experiences, then move to analysis, and conclude with commitment to action.
- 10. Do participants need to discuss all the questions in each session guide?**
No. The questions are designed to get participants talking, to help participants think about the session question, and to help participants make progress on the session goal. If the participants can do this without discussing certain questions, then don't have them discuss those questions.
- 11. In what sequence should the 4 parts of this series be used?**
The 4 parts of this series should be used in whatever sequence helps participants help students connect God's world and Word. Here's one sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (2) *Use Assessment*, (3) *Use Questions*, and (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*. Here's another sequence: (1) *Help Your Students Connect God's World and Word*, (3) *Use Questions*, (4) *Meet Student Learning Needs*, and (2) *Use Assessment*.
- 12. What's the bottom line?**
The bottom line is to get teachers to take action, to do something to help students connect God's world and Word. If teachers can achieve the bottom line more easily without using these materials, don't use them.

My plan for facilitating Session # _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ - _____ Location: _____

Session content (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I understand the significance of the session title and the goal.
- ☐ I have familiarized myself with the session content by reading through the session guide and reading.

Logistics (✓ the box if your response is "yes")

- ☐ I have reserved a place to meet.
- ☐ I have enough desks/chairs.
- ☐ I have enough copies of the session guide and reading.
- ☐ I have informed the participants of things they need to bring.
- ☐ I have selected a seating arrangement.
 - ☐ A circle ☐ Groups of 2-4
 - ☐ A U-shape ☐ Other _____
- ☐ Other: _____

Facilitation plan: Fill in times, select the group size, and select an option.

Time	Section	Group size	Options
_____ - _____	Connect with others	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Focus on this session's goal	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> Read the goal aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Read	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs <input type="checkbox"/> Individual	<input type="checkbox"/> One person reads aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Take turns reading aloud <input type="checkbox"/> Read silently <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Discuss the reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
_____ - _____	Commit to action	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group <input type="checkbox"/> Small group <input type="checkbox"/> Pairs	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole group debrief at end <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

**Suggested times for 60-minute session: Connect (7-10), Focus (3-5), Read (5-10), Discuss (25-35), and Commit (10).*

Session 1: Why use questions to help students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with a colleague

1. In terms of student learning, what is one thing you're excited about?
2. In one of your classes, what are your students learning about God's world and how people are using it?
3. What are some questions you ask your students?

Focus on this session's goal

To evaluate and improve your use of questions to help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

We want students to connect God's world and Word. Using questions can help. And knowing why you should use questions can help you find ways to better use questions. To learn more, read "Reading 1: Use questions to help your students connect God's world and Word."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is comfortable/uncomfortable about using questions to help students connect God's world and Word?

Find ways you can use questions

To find ways you can more effectively use questions to help your students make connections between God's world and Word, complete this self-assessment. Rate each item, using the following scale:

4: *Strongly agree* • 3: *Agree* • 2: *Disagree* • 1: *Strongly disagree*

- ___ 1. I can readily explain why God (who knows everything) asks questions.
- ___ 2. I can readily explain how using questions can help my students connect God's world and Word.
- ___ 3. I can readily explain the characteristics of good questions.
- ___ 4. I have documented the questions I want to ask my students to help them connect God's world and Word.
- ___ 5. My students respond sincerely to the questions I ask to help them connect God's world and Word.

Reflect on your self-assessment data with a colleague

1. How many 4s, 3s, 2s, and 1s do you have?
2. What is satisfying/unsatisfying about your data?
3. To help your students make better connections, what is one self-assessment item you want to make progress on? What are your reasons for selecting that item?
4. What 3 or more things could you do to make progress on that item?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order improve your use of questions to help your students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 1: Use questions to help your students connect God's world and Word

Interview with Michael Essenburg, school improvement coordinator

Why use questions to help students connect God's world and Word?

Michael: Two reasons. First, because it's doable.

What do you mean by "doable"?

Michael: Well, you already know how to ask questions. Your students already know how to answer questions. And you don't have to have all the answers. You can start with the answers you have. You can use questions anywhere, at any time, and without equipment—you don't need a whiteboard, sound system, projector, or computer.

Bottom line? You already have what you need to use questions. Today. Right now. During your next class. Just ask a question. How about "How can we use what we are learning to serve others?"

You said you had 2 reasons for using questions to help students connect God's world and Word. What's the other reason?

Michael: Because it works. Students connect God's world and Word as they consider questions—"How can I be a wise steward?" "How can I bridge cultural differences?" "How can I use math to make sense of God's world?"

Got any examples to support that?

Michael: Sure—one student shared, "Questions challenge me to think in new ways and help me be a discerning thinker, to use a biblical perspective."

And another student shared, "The question 'What's wrong with the world?' helped me. Many times in literature the characters are searching for truth and trying to escape whatever is wrong in their situations, so this question helps me connect to the Bible because the Bible tells us what exactly is wrong and how we can solve it (connecting to Christ)."

Do teachers think questions help students make connections?

Michael: Yes. An elementary teacher said, "My students have learned to apply a biblical perspective to course content. I ask them questions like, 'How can I show that I obey God?'"

A middle school teacher said, "In my classes I ask questions like 'How do authors help us see truth?' Using questions like this helps my students see God's will in all that they do and understand that God's Word applies to all subjects." And a high school teacher said, "Using questions has helped my students think through a biblical perspective and apply it to course content and to their lives."

So I should use questions because it's doable and it works.

Michael: You got it. You can use questions right now. Using questions will help your students connect God's world and Word.

Now what?

Michael: Take action. Do something to get better at using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading, by taking a self-assessment on using questions, and by using your assessment data to identify 2 or more action steps you will take to help your students make connections.

To help your students make connections, ask questions like...

What's true?

How can you be a good caretaker?

How should you deal with injustice?

How should you respond to competition?

How can you make healthy decisions?



Heidi, Science 5

I ask my students, "How does God show creativity?"

In our weather study, a student wrote, "No two things made by God are the same." In our current health unit, which focuses on growing and changing, one student responded, "God made us with detail. Each one of us is different."

Using questions helped me teach more intentionally.

Session 2: Why does God ask questions?

Connect with others

1. What is something you've seen God doing in your class(es) recently?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is a question that God asks? Tell me about that.

Focus on this session's goal

To analyze and explain why God asks questions.

Read

If God already knows everything, why does He ask questions? That's a good question. Let me respond to that question by asking, "Why do you ask your students questions when you already know the answer?" To learn more, read "Reading 2: God asks a lot of questions."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What questions does God ask? (See Gen. 3.9, 3.11, 3.13, 4.6-7, 4.10, 18.9; Job 38.2, 38.4-11, 38.12-13, 38.16-20, 38.22-41, 39.1-5, 39.9-12, 39.19-20, 40.2, 40.8-9, 41.1-7.)
3. What questions does Jesus ask? (See Mark 2.8, 2.9, 2.19, 3.4, 3.23, 3.33, 4.13, 4.21, 4.30, 4.40, 5.9, 5.30, 5.39, 6.38, 7.18, 8.5, 8.12, 8.17-21, 8.23, 8.27, 8.29, 8.36, 8.37, 9.12, 9.16, 9.19, 9.21, 9.33, 9.50, 10.3, 10.18, 10.36, 10.38, 10.51, 11.17, 11.30, 12.9, 12.10-11, 12.15, 12.16, 12.24, 12.26, 12.35, 12.37, 13.2, 14.6, 14.37, 14.41, 14.48, 15.34.)
4. How do you feel about the questions God asks? about the questions Jesus asks?
5. Why does God ask questions? Why does Jesus ask questions?
6. How can you follow Jesus' example of asking questions?
7. How would you explain why Jesus asks questions to a student? to a parent? to a colleague?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further analyze and explain why God asks questions?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 2: God asks a lot of questions

Hmm: God knows everything, and God asks questions. This seems strange. If God knows everything, why does He ask questions?

Before I respond to that question, please consider 3 situations:

1. You're teaching single-digit addition in first grade. You know $4 + 5 = 9$. Why do you ask SongHo, "What's $4 + 5$?"
2. You're starting a unit on the negative affects of substance abuse. You have researched the topic, developed an effective set of notes, and put up 2 bulletin boards. You start class by asking your 7th graders, "What can happen to you if you take illegal drugs?" Why do you ask this?
3. You're leading a workshop on using questions to help students connect God's world and Word. You have carefully prepared for this workshop. So why do you ask, "How can questions help students connect God's world and Word?"

In each of these 3 situations, you already know the answer:

1. You know that $4 + 5 = 9$.
2. You know quite a few negative effects of taking illegal drugs.
3. You know that using questions helps students connect God's world and Word.

If you already know the answers, why do you ask the questions? Because you know that questions serve purposes other than helping you learn something. Because you know that questions, among other things, give others the opportunity to learn, share, think, and grow.

God knows this, too. (He knew this before you did.) God knows where Adam is hiding in the garden, yet God asks Adam where he is (Gen. 3.9). Why does He ask this?

Jesus, the Master Teacher, asks questions all through the Gospels. Think of one question Jesus asks. Why does He ask it? (Want to read some questions that Jesus asks? Look in Mark 2.19, 3.4, 4.13, 5.30, 6.38, 7.18, 8.12, 9.16, 10.3, and 12.16.)

Why does Jesus ask questions? Among other things:

- To set the context for learning.
- To focus attention on something significant.
- To promote self-examination.
- To prod thinking.
- To show an interest in others.

What are some other reasons Jesus asks questions?

Take action: Analyze and explain why God asks questions. You can do this by discussing this reading and by explaining to 2 colleagues not present at this session why God asks questions.

To help your students make connections, ask questions like...

How can you be a wise steward?

How can music help you learn about God and creation?

How should Christians respond to bias?

How should Christians use wealth and power?

How will you promote goodness?



Tom, Math 6

Questions are a great tool for helping my students increase their understanding and application of a biblical perspective.

In my 6th grade math classes, students consider 2 biblical perspective questions: How can you make sense of God's world? How can you use math to serve God and others?

Session 3: How do questions help students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is something encouraging that happened in your class(es) recently?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. How do questions help your students learn?

Focus on this session's goal

To analyze and explain how questions help students connect God's world and Word.

Read

What helps students connect God's word and Word? Engaging in learning, having opportunities to think, and having repeated opportunities to connect God's world and Word. When you ask a question, students engage, think, and practice. To learn more, read "Reading 3: Questions help students make connections."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What positive/negative experiences have you had with using questions to help your students learn?
3. Explain your thinking for each of A-E: What is the likelihood that your students will get better at making connections if they...?
 - A. Aren't engaged in learning?
 - B. Don't have opportunities to think about how God's world and Word are connected?
 - C. Don't have time during class to think about how the part of God's world they're studying connects to God's Word?
 - D. Don't connect God's Word to their lives?
 - E. Don't get repeated practice in connecting God's world and Word?
4. Which of the 5 ways questions help students (listed in the reading) do you find helpful? Explain your thinking.
5. How would you explain to a colleague how questions can help his/her students connect God's world and Word?
6. What can you do to get better at explaining how questions help your students make connections?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further analyze and explain how questions help students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 3: Questions help students make connections

You're in your classroom, thinking: "We talk with students about our faith, and we model Christlike behavior. Our students encourage each other, help lead devotions and chapel, and participate in Bible class discussions. But they don't really seem to understand how math, English, and all their other subjects connect to God's Word."

Ever feel like this? Are you looking for a way to help your students better connect God's world and Word? By responding yes or no to the following 5 statements, find out if using questions will help your students:

1. My students feel that learning what God's Word teaches is boring.
2. Rather than rely on my suggestions, my students need to think for themselves about how God's world and Word are connected.
3. My students need time to think about how the part of God's world they're studying connects to God's Word.
4. My students need to connect God's Word to their lives, not just to what they study in class.
5. My students need more opportunities to practice connecting God's world and Word.

If you said yes in response to any of the 5 statements above, then use questions to help your students make connections. Here's why:

1. *Using questions is an effective instructional strategy that engages students in connecting God's world and Word.* When students are engaged, they learn. So rather than lecture, ask your students to discuss questions such as, "How moral is math?"
2. *Using questions gives your students opportunities to think about the connections between God's world and Word.* Open-ended questions (like "How do authors help us see truth?") are designed to have more than one correct answer. This encourages students to think in a discerning fashion. As students consider questions like, "How should Christians bridge cultural differences?" they learn to connect God's world and Word.
3. *Using questions gives your students time during class to think about how the part of God's world they are studying connects to God's Word.* Students commute to school, participate in after school activities, and do homework at night. By asking students to discuss or write about a question during class, you can provide your students with the time they need to connect God's world and Word.
4. *Using questions helps your students connect God's Word to their lives.* For example, when considering the question, "How should you treat others?" your students can connect God's command to love their neighbors to a story and to how they treat their family members.
5. *Using questions gives your students repeated opportunities to connect God's world and Word.* When students repeatedly respond to questions such as, "How can I care for God's creation?" they develop stronger connections between science and God's Word.

Take action: Analyze and explain how questions help students make connections. You can do this by discussing this reading and by explaining to 2 colleagues not present at this session how questions help.

To help your students make connections, ask questions like...

What if...?

What's the problem?

What's your responsibility?

What's the solution?

What's wrong with the world?

What makes good music good?

What makes us who we are?



Anda, Social Studies 6

My students used 2 questions to guide their independent research on ancient Egypt: How could a child of God have responded to the Egyptians? How is this [practice] similar to or different from what we believe?

Questions helped my students connect a biblical perspective to what they studied.

Session 4: What makes a good question good?

Connect with others

1. What is something that happened recently in class that made you smile?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is one question you like to ask your students?

Focus on this session's goal

To understand and apply the characteristics of good questions.

Read

If you want to use questions to help students connect God's world and Word, make sure you ask good questions. Make sure you ask questions that grab your students' attention, require upper-level thinking, allow for a variety of acceptable answers, connect God's world and Word, are essential, and are student-friendly. To learn more, read "Reading 4: Use good questions."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What kinds of questions do your students like/dislike responding to?
3. Which of the 6 characteristics listed in the reading do you find helpful? Explain your thinking.
4. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high), rate the questions you ask in terms of the extent to which they...
 - ___ Grab your students' attention.
 - ___ Require upper-level thinking.
 - ___ Allow for a variety of acceptable answers.
 - ___ Connect God's world and Word.
 - ___ Are essential.
 - ___ Are student-friendly.

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to further apply the characteristics of good questions?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 4: Use good questions

Use questions to help your students connect God's world and Word. Just make sure you use good questions. Here are 6 characteristics of a good question:

(1) *A good question grabs attention.* "What's wrong with the world?" grabs my attention. I'll bet it will grab your students' attention, too. It will certainly grab your attention more than "In the following Japanese short story set in the 1600s, what is the key issue the author addresses?" Remember, you must have your students' attention to help them learn.

(2) *A good question requires upper-level thinking.* "How can you be a wise steward?" requires your students to recall course content and biblical principles, analyze the situation, and evaluate options in order to choose the wisest course of action. "What are the 3 ways to reduce water consumption that we talked about in class?" requires your students to recall course content. Connecting God's world and Word involves analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, so be sure to ask questions that require upper-level thinking.

(3) *A good question allows for a variety of acceptable responses.* "Who are you?" allows for a variety of acceptable answers—image bearer of God, Christian/non-Christian, citizen of a given country, member of a given culture or ethnic group, member of a family. "Who are you?" allows for so many appropriate answers that the students will have some answers the teacher does not! On the other hand, "Did God create humans in His image?" has one answer: yes. Your students already know the answer, and your students know you know the answer. So, they stop thinking. Not good. Ask questions that allow for a variety of acceptable answers, that are open-ended. Get your students to think!

You want your students to connect God's world and Word now and throughout their lives. Unless you plan to be available 24/7 for your students, be sure to ask questions that help them make connections on their own right now so that they will be able to make connections throughout their lives.

(4) *A good question connects God's world (content and skills), God's Word, and students' lives.* "How can you respond effectively to mass media?" involves students in connecting God's world ("mass media"), God's Word ("respond effectively"), and their lives ("you"). "What is mass media?" addresses the definition of "mass media." When asked to give definitions, I think of "God's world," not of connections between God's world and Word.

(5) *A good question is essential—universal, timeless, at the heart of learning.* "Who is God?" is essential. "What are you going to do Friday night?" is not, though depending on what is happening Friday night, the question might seem more interesting. In the short term. It doesn't promote sustained reflection; "Who is God?" does.

(6) *A good question is student-friendly—short, with developmentally appropriate vocabulary.* "How can you use your learning to serve?" is student-friendly. It is short (8 words) and uses appropriate vocabulary. It is easy for students to understand, recall, and use. Imagine students asking each other, "How can you use your learning to serve?" When you ask a question of 10 words or more that doesn't use developmentally appropriate vocabulary, you decrease the likelihood that students will understand and use the question.

Take action: Increase your understanding and application of the characteristics of a good question. You can do this by discussing this reading and by using the characteristics of a good question to analyze the questions you ask.



Kim, English 10

Throughout our poetry unit, I used 2 questions to help my students connect God's world and Word: "What is the significance of words?" and "What's wrong with the world?"

In an essay one student wrote, "The basic truth that the writer of this song grasps is that the human heart is dark and evil.... It is a mad, confused world, but the Bible is the map."

Using questions works!

Session 5: What good questions do you want to ask your students to help them connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. In your class(es), what is one thing that's going well?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. What is a question you recently asked your students?

Focus on this session's goal

To document one or more questions you're going ask your students in order to help them connect God's world and Word.

Read

Ask your students one or more questions that will help them connect God's world and Word. Ask a question that relates to the content your students are learning, that engages your students, and that you like. To learn more, read "Reading 5: Ask your students a good question."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What is satisfying/unsatisfying about asking questions? about asking questions that help your students connect God's world and Word?
3. Which 2 or more questions from the list...?
 - A. Relate to the part of God's world your students study? Tell me about that.
 - B. Do you like, feel comfortable with, and have some answers for? Explain your thinking.
 - C. Do you think your students will find engaging? Tell me about that.
4. What is a question (not on the list) that you could ask your students in order to help them connect God's world and Word? How does that question reflect the 6 characteristics of a good question?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session in order to document one more questions and to ask your students one or more questions?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 5: Ask your students a good question

Ask your students a question that will help them connect the part of God's world they are studying and God's Word. Keep in mind that there is more than one question you can ask your students. So, choose a question that you think your students will find engaging and that you like, feel comfortable with, and have some answers for.

You have 3 options, only 2 of which are useful:

1. Stop now and don't choose a question. It's an option, and choosing this won't help your students connect God's world and Word.
2. Choose a question from the list of 45 questions below.
3. Use the 6 characteristics of a good question (sidebar) to develop your own question.

Here's a list of 45 questions you can ask your students:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. What's God's purpose for ____? | 27. How can you use music? |
| 2. What's wrong with the world? | 28. How can you use your creativity? |
| 3. What difference does Jesus make? | 29. How can you use your gifts and learning? |
| 4. How are you a witness for God? | 30. How can learning a language change you? |
| 5. How are God's mercy and justice related? | 31. How can you work with others? |
| 6. How aware should you be of culture? | 32. How can math help you learn about God and creation? |
| 7. How can art express your beliefs? | 33. How can music help you learn about God and creation? |
| 8. How can art express our relationship with God and creation? | 34. How can religion undermine God's work? |
| 9. How can you be a good caretaker? | 35. How can you use math to make sense of God's world? |
| 10. How can you be a wise steward? | 36. How can we praise God through music? |
| 11. How can you bring change? | 37. How can we see God's creative power in creation? |
| 12. How can you care for God's creation? | 38. How do authors help us see truth? |
| 13. How can you care for your body? | 39. How do you balance head and heart? |
| 14. How does God show us who He is? | 40. How do cultures affect/reflect worldviews? |
| 15. How can you communicate the truth in love? | 41. How do you balance needs and caretaking? |
| 16. How can you depict the Christian faith? | 42. How do you learn, live, and serve with others? |
| 17. How can you maintain your body as God's temple? | 43. How do you live out your convictions? |
| 18. How can you make healthy decisions? | 44. How do others help us see? |
| 19. How can you relate to the target culture? | 45. How do patterns help you make sense of God's world? |
| 20. How can you bridge cultural differences? | |
| 21. How can you repair relationships? | |
| 22. How can you serve God and others? | |
| 23. How can you solve the problem? | |
| 24. How can you use ____ (subject/topic) wrongly? | |
| 25. How can you use a biblical perspective? | |
| 26. How can you use math to serve others? | |

What make a good question good? A good question...

Grabs your students' attention.

Requires upper-level thinking.

Allows for a variety of acceptable answers.

Connects God's world and Word.

Is essential.

Is student-friendly.

Take action: Document one or more questions you're going to ask your students in order to help them connect God's world and Word. You can do this by discussing this reading, by selecting questions from the list above, and by writing down the questions you selected.

Session 6: How can you get your students to respond sincerely to your questions?

Connect with others

1. What is one way your students are growing?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. When you think of how your students respond to your questions, what word comes to mind? Tell me about that.

Focus on this session's goal

To get your students to respond sincerely to the questions you ask to help them connect God's world and Word.

Read

If you want your students to connect God's world and Word, get them to respond sincerely to your questions. Ways to do this include asking God for help, asking open-ended questions, and being a good listener. To learn more, read "Reading 6: Help your students respond sincerely."

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. What does it look like when your students respond sincerely to a question you've asked?
3. What is encouraging/discouraging about getting your students to respond sincerely to your questions?
4. What helps your students respond sincerely to your questions designed to help them connect God's world and Word? What hinders them?
5. Which 2 or more of the 10 action steps suggested in the reading would help you get your students to respond sincerely to your questions? Explain your thinking.
6. To help your students respond sincerely to your questions, what do you need to keep doing? stop doing? start doing?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take before our next session to get your students to respond sincerely to the questions you ask in order to help them connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)

Reading 6: Help your students respond sincerely

First, let me share what “respond sincerely” means. By “respond,” I mean consider, grapple with, reflect on, mull over, and interact with. By “sincerely,” I mean genuinely, earnestly, honestly, personally, and authentically. And by “respond sincerely,” I mean consider genuinely, grapple with earnestly, reflect on honestly, mull over personally, and interact with authentically.

Second, let me share what the opposites of “respond” and “sincerely” mean. Let me share what “react” and “insincerely” mean. By “react,” I mean oppose, fight, counter. Reactions lead to lack of learning, lack of reflection, and lack of sharing. By “insincerely,” I mean superficially, impersonally, and hypocritically. Insincerity makes me cringe and feel sad.

Now, let me give you a starter list of 10 action steps you can take to help your students respond sincerely to your questions:

1. Ask God for help. Regularly. Ask God to help your students respond sincerely to your questions so that they can connect God's world and Word.
2. Ask open-ended questions.
3. Make sure your students understand what each question means.
4. Be natural when asking questions to help your students make connections. If you feel uncomfortable asking questions, practice asking your colleagues questions about connecting God's world and Word. Do this until asking questions becomes natural. Students respond to questions that are asked naturally. Students don't respond to questions that feel fake or forced.
5. Be a good listener. Really listen to what your students say.
6. Make the class environment safe. Make it safe to respond sincerely to your questions. Have your students talk about what it feels like to be in a “sincere” discussion and an “insincere” discussion. Challenge your students to contribute to “sincere” discussions.
7. Build questions into your class. How? Put your questions on your syllabi. Post your questions on your bulletin boards, and regularly use them as a visual aid. Target one or more questions during each unit, and develop a unit assessment that targets the unit question(s).
8. Use engaging instructional strategies that involve each of your students in responding to a question, like small group discussion, role play, and journaling.
9. Give significant time in class for your students to reflect on your questions. Sincere responses take time to develop. Don't hurry your students.
10. Give your students repeated opportunities to respond to the same question.

Take action: Find ways to help your students respond sincerely to your questions. You can do this by discussing this reading and by selecting one action step from the list above and completing it.



Michael, school improvement coordinator

Here are 3 ways to use questions effectively. These 3 ways work. Use them:

1. Frame each of your classes (and each of your units) around your questions. For example, frame your English 10 course around 4 questions: Who are you? Who is your neighbor? What's wrong with the world? What is the significance of words?
2. Use your questions as the basis of unit and semester assessments. Be sure the assessments require your students to connect God's world and Word.
3. Post your questions on a bulletin board. This provides you and your students with an effective visual aid.

Session 7: How committed are you to using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Connect with others

1. What is one good thing that happened recently in your class(es)?
2. What progress did you make on your action steps? If completed: What did you learn as a result of completing your action steps? If not yet completed: What happened? What will you do to complete your action steps?
3. When do you ask your students questions?

Focus on this session's goal

To increase your commitment to using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word.

Read

Teachers who are committed to using questions value questions. Why? Because they know how useful questions are. They know, for example, that questions help students connect God's world and Word. How much do you value questions? To reflect further, read "Reading 7: How much do you value questions?"

Discuss the reading

1. What is one thing that interested you? Tell me about that.
2. How do you feel when you're allowed/not allowed to ask questions?
3. How do you feel when your students ask/don't ask questions?
4. If due to a disability you were unable to ask or answer any questions, how would this affect your life and your teaching?
5. How can questions help your students connect God's world and Word?
6. Overall in your teaching, what is the ratio of statements to questions? What do you think of that ratio?
7. On a scale of 1-5 (5 being high)...
- A. How committed are you to using questions in order to help students connect God's world and Word?
- B. How committed do you want to be?
8. What can you do to increase your commitment?

Commit to action

1. What 2 or more action steps are you going to take to increase your commitment to using questions to help students connect God's world and Word?
2. What are your highlights/insights from this session?
3. How can I pray for you? (Pray together.)



I would enjoy learning about how you are using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word. Please email me at learnmore@closethegapnow.org.

—Michael B. Essenburg

Reading 7: How much do you value questions?

Your student Hiro is in an accident. Amazingly, he's OK. Or at least everyone thinks he is. Then his parents notice that Hiro no longer recalls, asks, or writes down questions, 3 things he used to do. And he doesn't process questions either. It's as if he doesn't hear them when someone speaks or see them when reading. Hiro's parents take him to a specialist, get a check-up, and learn that for the foreseeable future, he'll be unable to ask or process questions.

Not a single question. Can't ask or answer: How are you? What do you want to do? Will you marry me? Can't ask or answer: How can I pray for you? What does this verse mean? How does God see this? Can't ask or answer: What's the assignment? What career looks good? How can we get this done?

Hiro can't ask or answer a single question. Until further notice. Possibly for the rest of his life.

How do you feel? I feel worse than terrible. Questions are racing around in my head: How will this affect his relationships? His home life? His friendships? His spiritual growth and church life? His education? His career possibilities?

You don't want Hiro's situation to continue. You want him to get better. Right now. So do I. Why? Because like you, I know how valuable questions are to Hiro.

So, how valuable are questions? Extremely valuable. Indispensable. As a teacher, ask yourself 2 questions:

1. If my students couldn't ask or answer a single question, how would this affect their ability to connect God's world and Word?
2. If I couldn't ask or answer a single question, how would this affect my ability to help my students connect God's world and Word?

So, what's the real question? It's not "How valuable are questions?" or even "How will you demonstrate that you value questions?" The real question is "How will you use questions to help your students connect God's world and Word?"

Remember: Success is your students connecting God's world and Word as they respond to your questions. Success is not you knowing that questions are valuable or even you demonstrating the value you place on questions.

But identifying the value you place on questions can help you more intentionally demonstrate that value. And if you more intentionally demonstrate the value you place on questions, you will ask more questions, and, consequently, your students will respond to more questions.

How much do you value questions? How committed are you to using questions to help your students connect God's world and Word?

Take action: Increase your commitment to using questions. Ways to do this include:

- Discussing this reading.
- Assessing how much you value questions, how committed you are to using questions, and how committed you want to be to using questions.
- Documenting and then asking 4-10 questions in a class you teach.
- Encouraging 2 colleagues not at this session to use questions to help their students connect God's world and Word.

To help your students make connections, ask questions like...

How does ____ (subject/topic) help you serve others?

How does a belief system influence a point of view?

How does God show us who He is?

How has culture shaped you?

How tolerant can a community be?