Essential Questions

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I begin with the end. When I start a new chapter, I spend quite a bit of time pondering what I most want my students to know, discuss, and retain. My essential questions cannot be answered by search engines. I combine current information with past learning. My aim is to incorporate all four Power Tools.

After deciding upon my essential question, my lesson plans take shape. I am able to determine what I want to use for Mini-Quizzes, Retrieval Guides, Retrieval Cards, and Power Tickets. After this, I figure out when and where to add these strategies into my lesson plans. And, finally, I teach!

Here are examples I have used with my middle school World History students.

- How did the changes implemented by Julius Caesar impact the social pyramid of ancient Rome?
- What was the impact of the Treaty of Versailles on WWII?
- After being a republic, why did French citizens give up their power to an absolute ruler? How do the two types of government differ?
- Compare and contrast the French Revolution with the Russian Revolution. State five reasons how they were alike and five reasons how they were different. Could either of them have been avoided? Defend your answer.
Here is an example from high school U.S. History teacher, Megan Pabon:

- What does it mean to be American? (Students reflect over this concept beginning with Reconstruction and followed by Westward Expansion, Industrial Revolution, Urbanization, and Immigration.)

Here are examples from Tammy Fulte, Art teacher:

Art reflects the time period, culture, geography of its creators. Students can articulate why certain choices were made in an artwork with regard to the materials available and the history of when it was made. They can compare and contrast many different works to their own.

- How does applying various elements (or sub-groups of one element) change the way your ideas are carried out and perceived by the viewer?

- What effect does employing various organizational design principles have on the way your work is read by the viewer?

- What can artwork tell us about what was going on in the time and place that it was created?

Here is an example from Ruth Meissen, seventh grade Art teacher:

- Research a real-world problem that impacts your country of origin or ethnic background. Now imagine you had magical powers. What solution would you create that would solve that problem? What would it look like, and how would it work? And P.S., no one can die as part of your solution. (That usually gets an "awwwwwwe".)
They must create a prototype/prop that will be used in their presentation demo. They must also create a poster that includes:

- Three reasons WHY we should care
- A drawing of the (magical) solution

Students LOVE this project! They love having an opinion and a voice that is heard. And the bonus is you get to see your students’ passion for a cause they feel is important. It really gives you more insight into who they are. I have NEVER been asked to help a group identify a problem. If anything, they are usually shocked how many problems there are in any given country.