

Stenhouse Close-Ups

Twenty Questions Homework



KELLY GALLAGHER

WORKSHOP GUIDE

Copyright © 2006 Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, Maine

All rights reserved. This guide may be photocopied for staff development use only.

Twenty Questions Homework

Workshop Overview

1. Copy and distribute “Twenty Questions Homework” (pages 4-5) and “Twenty Questions” (page 6) to participants before viewing.
2. View DVD and discuss.
3. Ask participants to try the Twenty Questions homework assignment in their classrooms.

Twenty Questions Homework

by Kelly Gallagher

I designed the Twenty Questions homework assignment to illustrate to students that it's normal for good readers to be confused when starting a book. It helps reinforce the notion that confusion is normal and is a good thing. Strong readers develop the ability to live with ambiguity, and they trust that the author will eventually clear up confusion. This assignment helps students to see that.

Because of the demands of testing accountability and other intrusions, I have less instructional time in the classroom. As a result, the importance of homework has been intensified. I structure my reading assignments so that students are responsible for "first-draft reading" at home. I help them approach their homework beforehand by carefully framing the chapter for them, often providing them a specific purpose for reading the text. Once I have done that, their job is to work through the reading, developing questions as they read. My job is to re-read parts the next day, helping them to see some of the richer meaning they may have missed on their initial reading. In short, they read for homework; I re-read with them the next day.

Two ideas guide all my homework assignments:

1. I believe students should be required to read for homework every single night of the school year. Much of the homework reading will be academic in nature, but a large chunk should be devoted to recreational reading as well. Goals should be set for recreational reading homework.
2. Academic homework should not be busy work. It should drive meaningful learning. I do not assign homework for the sake of having homework.

As far as academic homework goes, I do not collect assignments daily. If students have an assignment due today, I will stamp their papers (for credit) when they come in the door. At the end of the unit I will collect all of the stamped homework assignments in a packet. If the packet has ten assignments in it, for example, I will have students place a sticky note on the one assignment they think shows their best thinking. I will randomly choose a second assignment. These will be the only assignments I grade in the packet. I firmly believe students need to read and write considerably more than I can physically grade.

As I move around the room stamping the papers, I talk with each student. If a student does not have his or her homework, I determine if the missing assignment is due to a problem with will (didn't get around to doing it) or skill (is unable to do it). Usually, it's a will issue. In that case, I ask the student to verbally commit to doing the next homework assignment. If this happens repeatedly, I call home. If the student does not do the homework due to a skill issue, I try to determine what the issue is to help design the appropriate remediation approach.

Student homework discussions have two focal points: 1) they are asked to share whatever confusion they had with the reading and then try to work it out without the teacher's help; and 2) they discuss their thoughts regarding the purpose of last night's reading. For example, I might ask the students to read Chapter 5 with the purpose of watching for a developing theme. When they meet in groups the next day, they discuss their theories regarding the developing theme.

As I move about the room, I monitor their conversations. This enables me to see what they understood during their homework reading. It also helps me to see what they didn't understand about last night's reading, which, in turn, helps me to decide what to focus on once the group discussions are over.

Questions for Group Discussion After Viewing

1. Do you think most of your students who don't complete homework have issues with "skill" or "will"?
2. How have your homework assignments changed over the years?
3. How can teachers align the school homework policies with an assignment like *Twenty Questions*?
4. What was Kelly's role in the small groups?
5. What texts might you use the *Twenty Questions* assignment with in your classroom?

Workshop and Classroom Extensions

1. Ask everyone to try *Twenty Questions* with students before the next workshop or meeting, bringing in samples of a range of student responses.
2. Distribute a brief article from today's newspaper, and ask participants to read it silently and write down questions. Discuss in small groups. How are questions derived from nonfiction reading different than those inspired by the novel *1984* in Kelly's classroom?
3. Ask participants to bring in two recent homework assignments from their classrooms—one they feel is exemplary, and one that didn't work as well for students. Discuss in small groups the attributes of good literacy homework assignments.

Further Reading

"*Twenty Questions*" Homework in *Deeper Reading*, page 58.

“Twenty Questions”

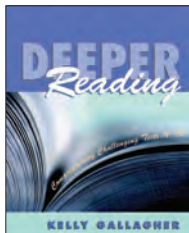
Generated by William, a seventeen-year-old,
after reading the first chapter of *1984*

1. How can clocks strike thirteen?
2. What are “Victory Mansions”?
3. What is “Hate Week”?
4. Who is Big Brother?
5. What is a telescreen?
6. Who belongs to the “Party”?
7. Why do party members wear uniforms?
8. What does “INGSOC” mean?
9. What is the Ninth Three-Year Plan?
10. Who are the “Thought Police”? Why are they called this?
11. Which countries are found in Oceania?
12. What is Airstrip One?
13. What do the following slogans mean?
 - War is Peace
 - Freedom is Slavery
 - Ignorance is Strength
14. What is the Ministry of Truth?
15. What is the Ministry of Peace?
16. What is the Ministry of Plenty?
17. What is Ministry of Love?
18. Why are products like gin and cigarettes called “Victory Gin” and “Victory Cigarettes”?
19. How could it be that “nothing is illegal”?
20. What is the “Two Minutes Hate”? What function does it serve?

Also by Kelly Gallagher:

Building Adolescent Readers

(available on VHS and DVD)



Deeper Reading

*Comprehending Challenging
Texts, 4-12*

Reading Reasons

*Motivational Mini-Lessons
for Middle and High School*



Stenhouse

PUBLISHERS

www.stenhouse.com