

# PLANNING A COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTIONAL SEQUENCE LESSON

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## Developing a Quality Question for Opening Discussion

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Student engagement in complex thinking can be promoted by strategically introducing students to the topic of a text that students will read. It takes a well-crafted question to simultaneously grab student interest, focus student attention on the topic, and launch a quality opening discussion. This “hook” question needs to guide all class members to take a position so that, by the end of the discussion, students find a purpose for reading the text. In order to create these discussion dynamics, the “hook” question requires strategic planning of the following two elements:

- format of the question.
- teacher expectation of student response to the question.

The success of any “hook” question depends upon careful crafting and execution. The way that the question is constructed forces student involvement in the topic as long as the teacher expects a response from all students in the class. Consequently, both the question’s design and the expectations of the teacher are key.

### Format

The format of an effective “hook” question includes two parts:

- **Question Stem/Topic:** The first part of the “hook” is the stem. It is written in question form and focuses on a world-relevant topic that can capture student interest. Topics that challenge student thinking such as those involving contrasts or cause/effect relationships usually align with interests and concerns of adolescent learners. The question stem takes a broad perspective of the topic of the specific text that students are preparing to read. As an example, the following stem focuses on the broad topic of “historical impact” (cause/effect relationship) prior to reading the text, *Dynasties to Communism*: “Based on your perspective, how much has history impacted the lives of the Chinese people today?” Since a “hook” question sets the tone for subsequent text-reading, its alignment with state standards is vital to keeping students focused on significant big ideas in text throughout their pre-reading discussion.
- **Student Options:** The “hook” question stem segues into a corresponding list of options that present a range of perspectives from which students can choose and plays the important role of setting the

class up for maximum engagement in class discussion. Using the earlier stem example for the text, *Dynasties to Communism*, the corresponding list of student options could include the following:

- history has much impact on the present
- history has some impact on the present
- history has little impact on the present.

Sample “hook” questions are complete with stem and student options in the text box below.

As teachers construct a list of options for their own “hook” questions, they need to make sure that the options reflect a varying continuum of two or three choices. For example:

- two opposing perspectives: *agree* or *disagree*
- three different qualifiers: *always*, *sometimes*, or *never*

### **SAMPLE “HOOK” QUESTIONS**

Based on your perspective, how much control do we really have over own lives?

- Much control
- Some control
- Little control

How valuable has space travel been to our country?

- Very valuable
- Somewhat valuable
- Of little value

Which do you think is most true?

- Genetics has a greater impact on individuals than the environment.
- Environment has a greater impact on individuals than genetics.

### **Teacher Expectations**

The “hook” question sets up class discussion, however, asking three or four students to respond to the question one at a time will precipitate minimal discussion. To set discussion dynamics in motions, the better approach is for the teacher to ask all students in the class to think about the options presented in the question and briefly discuss with a partner. Then, afterwards, each individual student takes a position by voting (i.e., raise of hand) for the option of their choice, prepared to justify their position in large group. Throughout this discussion, the teacher uses contrasts in student input as the basis for deciding who to call upon for comment. The expectation that each speaker provide explanation for his or her position is consistently enforced. Such expectations stir students’ emotional investment in the topic and maximize student engagement in their own learning.