CRAFTING ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS AND ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

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Source: *Understanding by Design*
by Jay McTighe & Grant Wiggins, © 2004, 2005
Goals

• What is an enduring understanding?
• How do I write effective enduring understandings?
• What is an essential question?
• How do I write effective essential questions?
Making the Connection

What is the issue, challenge, investigation, scenario, or problem?

Big Idea

What overarching conceptual understanding do I want students to perceive?

Topic or Content Standard

Enduring Understanding

Essential Question

What broad or topical conceptual question do I want students to be able to answer?
Definitions of Enduring Understandings

Enduring understandings:

• are statements summarizing important ideas and core processes that are central to a discipline and have lasting value beyond the classroom.

• synthesize what students should understand—not just know or do—as a result of studying a particular content area.

• articulate what students should “revisit” over the course of their lifetimes in relationship to the content area.
Characteristics of Enduring Understandings

Enduring Understandings

• frame the big ideas that give meaning and lasting importance to such discrete curriculum elements as facts and skills
• can transfer to other fields as well as adult life
• “unpack” areas of the curriculum where students may struggle to gain understanding or demonstrate misunderstandings and misconceptions
Characteristics of Enduring Understandings

Enduring Understandings

• provide a conceptual foundation for studying the content area and

• are deliberately framed as declarative sentences that present major curriculum generalizations and recurrent ideas.
Examples of Enduring Understandings

- English Language Arts Enduring Understandings
  - Conventions of language help readers understand what is being communicated.
  - The impact of a text on a reader is influenced by the reader’s experience.
- Math Enduring Understandings
  - Change is fundamental to understanding functions.
  - The probability of an event can be used to predict the probability of future events.
Enduring Understandings can be focused on:

- Concepts
- Themes
- Issues/Debates
- Problems/Challenges
- Processes
- Theories
- Paradoxes
- Assumptions/Perspectives
Examples of Enduring Understandings

• Science Enduring Understandings
• The structures of materials determine their properties.
• There are observable, predictable patterns of movement in the Sun, Earth, and Moon system that account for day/night.
Examples of Enduring Understandings

• Social Studies Enduring Understandings
• Students will understand that the principles and ideals underlying
• American democracy are designed to promote the freedom of the American people.
• Distinctions between a citizen’s rights, responsibilities, and privileges help to define the requirements and limits of personal freedom.
Definition of Essential Question

- One that lies at the heart of a subject or a curriculum and promotes inquiry and uncoverage of a subject.
Characteristics of Essential Questions

• Have no simple “right” answer
• Provoke & sustain inquiry
• Address conceptual or philosophical foundations
• Raise other important questions
• Naturally & appropriately recur
• Stimulate vital, ongoing rethinking
Characteristics of Essential Questions

- Recurs throughout all our lives
- Refers to core ideas & inquiries within a discipline
- Helps students effectively inquire and make sense of important but complex ideas, knowledge, know-how
- Engages a specific & diverse set of learners
Examples of Essential Questions

• What is a true friend?
• To what extent does art reflect culture or shape it?
• Is everything quantifiable?
• To what extent is DNA destiny?
• In what ways is algebra real and in what ways is it unreal?
• To what extent is U.S. history a history of progress?
Examples of Essential Questions

• Must heroes be flawless?
• Who is entitled to own what?
• Is the subjunctive necessary?
• What makes writing worth reading?
• Does practice make perfect?
• What is healthy eating? Healthy living?
Intent, not Language, is the Key

- Why we pose the question
- How students are to tackle it
- What learning activities & assessments we expect
Types of Essential Questions

• Overarching: Frame courses and programs of study around truly big ideas
• Topical: Are unit specific but still promote inquiry

GOOD TEACHING USES BOTH!
Overarching Essential Questions

• More general, broader
• Point beyond specific topics or skills
• Promote transfer of understanding
• This should be the focus of your authentic or problem based lesson.
Examples of Overarching EQ

• Can a fictional story be “true”?
• How do a region’s geography, climate, and natural resources affect the way people live and work?
• How does technological change influence people’s lives? Society?
• How does what we measure influence how we measure?
Examples of Overarching EQ

• How do we classify the things around us?
• Do artists have a responsibility to their audience? To society?
• How does language shape culture?
• Is pain necessary for progress in athletics?
Topical Essential Questions

• Unit specific - used to guide individual units
• Promote inquiry
• Resist simple answers
• Require explanation & justification
• One could be more than one in a unit.
Examples of Topical EQ

- How might Congress have better protected minority rights in the 1950s & 1960s?
- Should we require DNA samples from every convicted criminal?
- Are we going into a recession?
Examples of Topical EQs

• What is the value of place value?
• What is electricity?
• How do we hit with greatest power without losing control?
Writing EUs and EQs

Step 1 - Identify desired results

- What curriculum expectations do we need to meet? (TEKS)
- What should they know and be able to do (filter TEKS – Content, Skills, Concepts)?
- What do they need to understand?
  - Big Picture, Big Concepts, What is the “Unit” about?
  - This can come from the standards and your objectives for the unit.
Filtering the standards

Identify the big concepts in the TEKS

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>American Revolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>Citizenship. The student understands the rights and responsibilities of citizens of the United States. The student is expected to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Define and give examples of unalienable rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.19A</td>
<td>Citizenship. The student understands the importance of voluntary individual participation in the democratic process. The student is expected to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.20</td>
<td>Analyze reasons for and the impact of selected examples of civil disobedience in U.S. history such as the Boston Tea Party and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Filtering the standards – Social Studies

**What are the major concepts/Big Ideas?**
- Government, Citizenship, Principals, Rights, civil disobedience

**What is the Enduring Understanding that you want students to come away with?**
- Sometimes the people believe they need to change or overthrow government to protect their rights and liberties.

**What is the Essential Question that you want students to be able to answer?**
- **Overarching:** When is it acceptable for the people to overthrow a government?
- **Topical:** Were the American colonist justified in starting the Revolution?
Filtering the standards - ELA

**What are the major concepts/Big Ideas?**
- “I want students to understand the powerful impact that literature can have on a society.”

**What is the Enduring Understanding that you want students to come away with?**
- Art both shapes and reflects the culture in which it is created.

**What is the Essential Question that you want students to be able to answer?**
- **Overarching:**
  Does literature primarily reflect culture or shape it?
- **Topical:**
  What does *Romeo & Juliet* teach us about Shakespeare’s view of destiny? How does it compare to yours?
Filtering the standards

Practice – Participants will go to TEKS in their unit and use these to work with developing EUs and EQs.

• What are the major concepts/Big Ideas?

• What is the Enduring Understanding that you want students to come away with?

• What is the Essential Question that you want students to be able to answer?

• Overarching:
• Topical: