

Learning to Answer High-Level Questions

The Need

At some juncture, every teacher is faced with a similar quandary: How to get students to fully understand what a high-level question is asking. Every meaningful achievement test is passed or failed based upon the number of high-level questions a student can answer. If the whole of the question is not fully understood (explicitly and implicitly), the prospect of a completely accurate or even a reasonable response is remote indeed.

The Challenging Causes

High-level questions present great challenges because they *assume prior knowledge exists* or they are *composed of multiple components* that must be considered as a composite -- that is, several items of data must be synthesized and understood as if they were a single piece of datum.

Another predictable situation may involve the learners. Students that experience the greatest difficulties are those that are seldom -- if ever -- challenged to think on a high level; thus, they consider only the surface aspects of any given situation. Abstract and hypothetical thought are not parts of their routine exercises. Their customary approach to high level questions is consequently fraught with simplistic and direct assumptions that apply only to low and moderately leveled (*un-layered*) questions.

The Cures

Frontloading or pre-teaching usually refers to giving students background knowledge about a subject to be taught. This knowledge serves as a preparation and platform. It's a form of scaffolding; for, it raises the students' potential and ability to fathom and assimilate new knowledge or understanding by making the new seem somewhat familiar and providing meaningful hinge-points or points of connection.

Activating schema is a technique that prepares students to receive new information by causing them to recall salient and meaningful prior experiences (old knowledge) that relate to the new knowledge that must be manipulated in order to answer high-level questions in meaningful ways. Probing with related questions can adequately accomplish this.

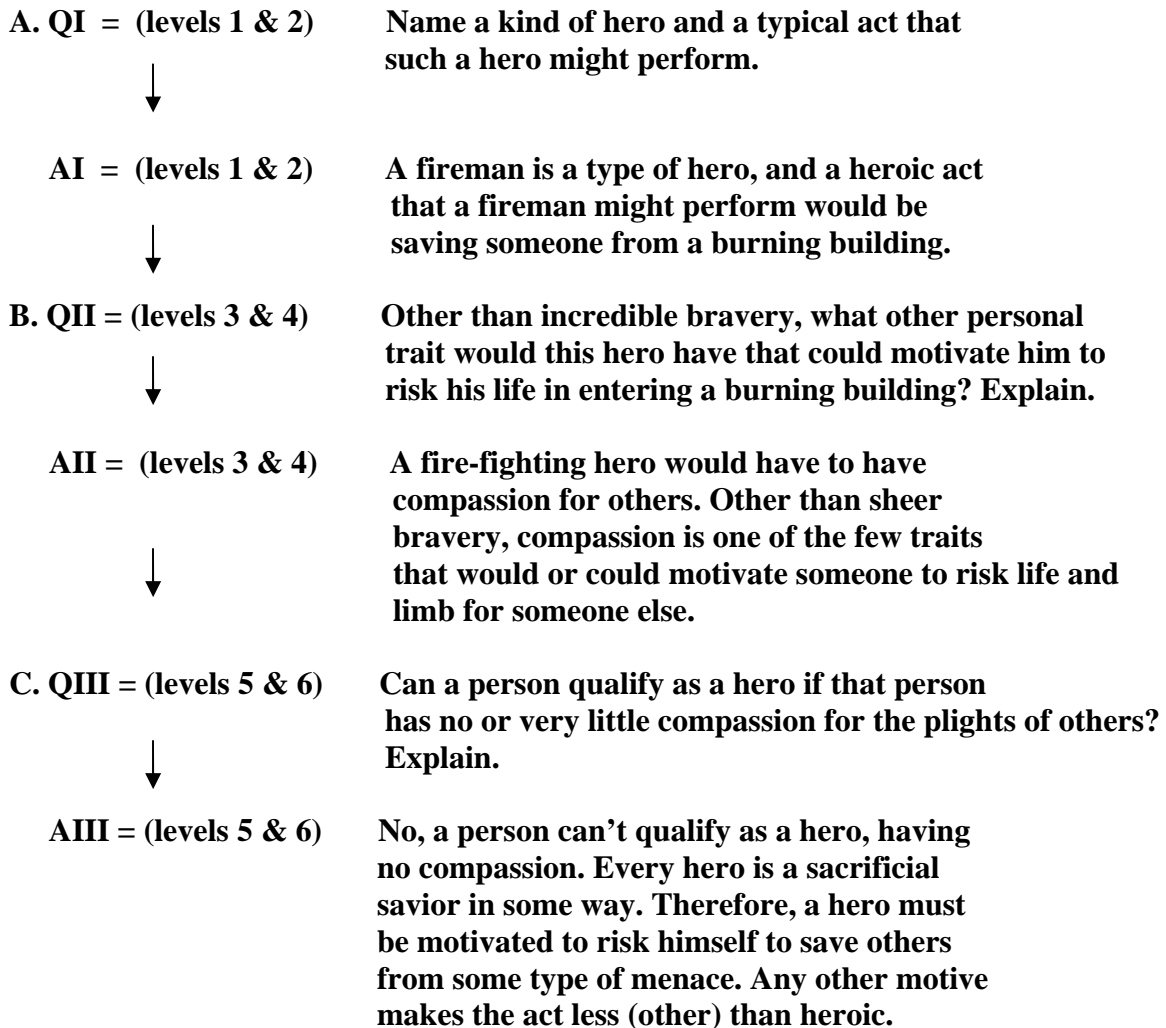
Interrogative scaffolding is the approach that says a high-level question must be examined and reduced (reverse scaffolded) to three lower component questions that can be asked sequentially such that the logical response to the first (primary question (level 1-2) can be predicted. Once a response can be predicted to the primary question, an appropriate secondary question (level 3-4) can then be forged and phrased. When the response to the secondary question has been properly assumed then the high-level (5-6) *target question* can be formulated and asked.

Interrogative Scaffolding Technique (IST)

(Rationale)

In order for students who are unaccustomed to high-level (levels 4-6 on Bloom's Taxonomic Scale) thought processing to become equipped to comprehend and logically respond to analytical, synthesizing, and evaluative questions, a means of *interrogative scaffolding* must be in place. The following flowchart demonstrates a workable sequence of steps. Note: Subsequent questions are based on the previous answers, not the previous questions.

Flowchart



Adjacent Level 5 & 6 Questions

1. **Compare and contrast real-life heroes with television or movie heroes. Which one of these heroes is more likely to impact society in a positive way. Defend your answer with realistic examples?**
2. **At what age is it most appropriate to teach people about heroes? Justify your answer.**
3. **What role does the hero play in shaping a society's moral standards?**
4. **What role does society play in shaping a hero's moral standards?**
5. **Is it possible for a society to not need heroes? Explain.**
6. **During your life-time, have heroes changed the world in any way? Explain.**
7. **Is it necessary for a hero to be *bigger-than-life*? Explain.**
8. **Is it okay for a hero to have some flaws? If so, what kind are permissible and why? If not, why not?**
9. **Explain the kind(s) of training that a young hero would need to receive.**
10. **In what ways do firemen and policemen share heroic traits?**
11. **Compare and contrast two heroic characters from two previously studied selections. How does their portrayal suggest the author's view of heroes?**
12. **Can a *regular person* ever realistically become a true-to-life hero? Explain.**