

# **Questioning the Author**

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## **Introduction**

Questioning the Author (QtA) is a “during reading” strategy aimed at helping students monitor their reading comprehension. Students are encouraged to pause in their reading periodically to ask questions designed to help them build meaning from a text. Among the suggested questions are:

- What is the author saying?
- What is the author’s message?
- What is the author talking about?
- Did the author explain clearly?
- Does this follow with what the author told us before?
- What does the author assume that we already know?
- Does the author tell us why?
- Why do you think the author tells us this information now?

The strategy is intended to be introduced to students during whole class readings, so that students listen to and collaborate with their peers as they grapple with ideas presented in the text. In this whole class setting, teachers can also model for their students the type of thinking that expert readers engage in as they read. In addition to helping students be more metacognitive, the strategy is also designed to show students that some of the responsibility for a text making sense belongs to the author of that text. (Buehl, 113)

## **Research Findings**

Isabel Beck, Margaret Mckeown, Cheryl Sandora, Linda Kucan and Jo Worthy developed QtA and have conducted most of the research on using the strategy in the classroom. They describe the attributes of QtA as follows:

- (a) It addresses text as the product of a fallible author;
- (b) it deals with text through general probes for meaning directed toward making sense of ideas in the text;
- (c) it takes place in the context of reading as it initially occurs;
- and (d) it encourages collaboration in the construction of meaning.

(Beck , 391)

As outlined by its creators, QtA is geared to helping students understand text *as* they read rather than after they read. Additionally, the strategy is intended to create a more open environment where students learn to better comprehend the text and express their thoughts in “constructive conversation” (Beck, 391).

From 1992 to 1993 Beck, McKeown, Sandora, Kucan and Worthy conducted a study on the effects of using QtA in a social studies classroom and a language arts classroom for an entire school year. Prior to their participation in the study, teachers in both classrooms had relied primarily on simple information retrieval to check their students’ reading comprehension. The dialogue transcripts presented in the study reveal a typical interaction consisting of a teacher asking a factual question aimed at literal text information and a student responding with a one-word answer. Also, “in baseline lessons, students never acknowledged each others’ comments except to correct wrong answers or to comment on ‘dumb’ questions asked by their classmates” (Beck, 402).

As the year progressed and students became more familiar with QtA, the researchers found student responses became less predictable and included more elaborate accounts of what

they did and did not understand (Beck, 393). In both classes, the amount of student discourse significantly increased and the teachers' dominance over discussion decreased. In the social studies classroom, student talk more than tripled (Beck, 399). A major shift occurred in the type of questions teachers asked away from information retrieval towards construction of meaning. (Beck, 395) Students also began responding to each others' comments not just the teacher's.

The researchers found that increased engagement with the text extended beyond class discussions to independent reading. After analyzing the results of a pretest and posttest for construction of meaning, the authors state, "The overall results from analysis of the individual tasks show that students in an independent comprehension situation were indeed moving toward the kind of engagement with text ideas characteristic of the collaborative discussions that had taken place in their classrooms" (Beck, 408). As one teacher noted, "The biggest change in my view of teaching has been an enormous shift to teach for depth of understanding and ownership of concepts rather than for exposure to a vast quantity of material" (Beck, 410).

Though there appears to be no other research on QtA specifically, various studies on discussion and reading comprehension can certainly be related to QtA. For instance, Bruce Larson conducted a year-long study in which he followed 6 teachers, focusing on their views of discussion and the ways in which they used discussion in their classrooms. His article "Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion as Method and Outcome" also serves as a brief summary of previous research on discussion. Larson found that the teachers in his study labeled most types of classroom interaction as discussion. The most common interaction between teachers and students was recitation. Larson noted that the teachers differentiated "between different types of discussion with each having specific characteristics and purposes" (Larson, 23-34). He categorized two types of discussion. Firstly, teachers used discussion "as a method of

instruction, where the purpose is to help engage students in a lesson by ‘sparking a reaction,’ ‘making analogies,’ ‘bringing alternative ideas to the topic,’ or ‘*making them think a little bit more instead of just regurgitating information...*’” Secondly, teachers used discussion “as the subject matter – as the desired outcome of instruction and an end in itself” (Larson, 10). While Larson described these as two distinctly separate reasons for using the discussion method, the teachers in his study usually used discussion in their classes with both goals in mind.

The third study we reviewed addressed improving reading comprehension through higher order thinking skills. The subjects of this research were elementary students, but many of the findings can be applied to secondary students. Teachers participating in the study commented that although their students began the year with an impressive ability to read words, many lacked the ability to fully understand what they read (McKown, 5). In order to combat this problem, the observed classes started to use modeling, think-aloud, visualizing, inferring, summarizing, making connections, predicting, and metacognition while they read (McKown, 16). The QtA approach uses several of these strategies, so the results of this study should relate well to the QtA study. Most of the observed students had trouble implementing the new strategies on their own, but became better at using them after extensive teacher modeling and practicing with the whole class as well as in the groups.

The researchers used three different pretest/posttest sets in order to gauge student progress. They recorded statistically significant positive results on each test. In fact, on one of the tests given to a third grade class, eleven of sixteen students scored at least 80% better on the posttest (McKown, 33). Several of the teachers stated that they found modeling and think-aloud to be especially helpful ways to help students improve their comprehension (McKown, 36). Though many of the students still needed significant guidance on questioning, inferring, and

summarizing, teachers generally found that their students were eventually able to use the rest of the strategies independently (McKown, 36).

## **Results**

Collin and Sarah conducted separate lessons with their students using the QtA strategy. Collin used the strategy in a Geography class to read a paper on population growth by Al Gore. Sarah used the strategy in a Government class to read a letter by anti-federalists opposing ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

### *Collin's Results*

In both classes I would say that the lesson was rather successful, though I felt that it was much better in the first class than in the second class. In the first period class, I could have stopped them at more points to ask questions about the passage, including checking whether or not they understood some of the vocabulary and examples Gore used to illustrate his points. I also think I was sometimes a little too abrupt to go into teacher mode instead of letting them come to conclusions themselves or bring up counter points. For instance, I questioned them about paragraph 3, a paragraph which I felt was somewhat unnecessary, though I did not say what I thought about it initially. I asked them what they thought, and many of them said Gore's example was not a particularly necessary example given the examples he had given in the previous paragraph. Once I'd gotten this response I began to talk about how I agreed, as if this were the correct assessment of the paragraph. One student then raised his hand and talked about how for him the example in paragraph 3 was a really interesting and eye-opening way of expanding on the previous examples to make the reader think about it in a way they hadn't previously. It forced me to backtrack and say, "Actually, yeah. That is a useful paragraph when

you think about it that way.” Overall the first class went well; I thought it was a bit boring, but my CT disagreed. One thing I should have clarified to the class is that I wanted them to interrupt me without regard to rudeness as I was reading through the second part of the article. I started panicking inside when I kept reading and no one stopped me, but it turned out they were just a little shy about it.

The second class went wonderfully. I asked a few more questions at the beginning, and for the rest of the time they started to ask questions themselves without me having to do nearly as much of the QtA queries. They also were not shy at all about asking me about vocabulary and telling Gore that he didn't need to use such big words (though quite a few of them were words they'll have to learn to use). While I was reading they were also much better about stopping me to question, probably in part because I was so specific about being rude to me and not caring. At some points, they were so quick to question that I had to encourage them to wait and question at the end of the next paragraph or two, at which point Gore clarified how his points related. I noticed for this and the other class though that the trend was to stop me and to explain what the author was saying, rather than actually stating any of the queries. I was still pleased by this though, because the ultimate goal is comprehension and critical analysis, which they were able to do.

### *Sarah's Results*

Due to scheduling changes, I only had 25 minutes to teach my lesson, so I chose to read the anti-federalist letter by Findley, Whitehill and Smilie with my students. As laid out in my lesson plan, students read the letter aloud, and I stopped them at designated spots to discuss what

the authors were saying. Overall, the lesson went well and generated a fair amount of discussion.

I have to admit that for a class of seniors reading a primary source document, I don't think that 'Questioning the Author' is a *novel* strategy. I think most teachers, whether they are consciously using the strategy or not, pause their students while they are reading and check on comprehension by asking such questions as "what is the author's message here?" or "what is the author talking about?" For a primary source document, such questions are especially important, because students may be struggling with vocabulary and unfamiliar language.

I think what was most beneficial about using the strategy was that it forced me to consider exactly where I wanted to stop my students reading, taking into account the difficulty of the language and how much new information was being introduced. I worked out ahead of time which paragraphs we would spend more time on and which were less important. The fact that the strategy encourages reading out loud as a class is also a bonus. There is no doubt in my mind that students gained more from reading and discussing the letter in class than if they had read it alone.

Perhaps because we were reading a primary source document rather than a textbook, I found that we focused mostly on three of the suggested questions – what is the author saying, what is the author's message and what is the author talking about? Also, I was the only one that stopped the reading. Although I encouraged my students to interrupt our reading if they had a question, none did so.

In the future, I could definitely see using this strategy as a guide for students to lead class discussions. I think for older students, this might be a better use of the strategy, as they would be the ones who read a document ahead of time and figure out which points they want to emphasize

or clarify. In this way, students would be doing most of the thinking rather than the teacher. As it was, in my class, I still felt as though I did most of the thinking and initiated most of the discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Both the research findings as well as our own experiences in the classroom showed that QtA is a valuable strategy for both teachers and students to use as they read text. In two of the studies we reviewed, teachers acknowledged that most of their interactions with students consisted primarily of recitation and questions directed at simple information retrieval. QtA provides a way for teachers to move beyond questions aimed at checking facts to questions geared to helping students construct deeper meaning from a text. The research showed that used in whole class settings, QtA can stimulate class discussion, a desirable teaching method and outcome, and encourage students to engage with each other about a text and not simply with the teacher. QtA can also help students become more metacognitive about their reading. If modeled well by a teacher, QtA can help students monitor their comprehension as they read by asking the author certain questions.

The results in Collin's and Sarah's classrooms showed that QtA helped generate class discussion although Sarah felt that she as the teacher still primarily initiated discussion. Collin found that his second class went much better than the first with students taking ownership of the reading and asking their own questions of the author. It's perhaps fair to conclude, therefore, that as a teacher becomes more familiar with using the strategy, he or she will be able to use it better encouraging students to initiate questions and discussion.

## Works Cited

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2. Buehl, Doug. Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning. Madison: International Reading Association, 2001.
3. Larson, Bruce E. "Teachers' Conceptions of Discussion as Method and Outcome." Report: ED407692.28pp. Mar 1997. ERIC Database.
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## Collin's Lesson Plan

### Context:

This lesson will be presented to two Advanced Placement Human Geography classes, each taught by Christian Lesnett, a 5<sup>th</sup> year social studies teacher at Woodside High School in Newport News. The class is an elective open to all grades at the high school. Consequently, the class is a mix of students across grades 9-12. The school is on block scheduling, however the 1<sup>st</sup> period AP class meets every day for less time. The 5<sup>th</sup> period class meets for 90 minutes every other day. None of the students in either class have IEPs. Each class is on the smaller side, with no more than 20 students in each class.

At the time of this lesson, the classes are in a unit on population trends. They have already read about certain trends in the textbook, including the ideas of Thomas Malthus, Karl Marx, and other prominent thinkers who have commented on population changes. Additionally, they have held a Socratic seminar to discuss two articles that present various reasons for the growth or decline of populations in certain parts of the world. The article that will be used for this Questioning the Author lesson, an excerpt from Al Gore's 1992 book *Earth in Balance*, fits well within this unit. In this 3 page selection of the book Gore presents the problem of rapid population increase in third world countries, a trend that is already causing problems for these nations and will only continue to cause more serious problems in the future. After explaining several of the causes of this unsustainable demographic shift, he puts forth a strategy for addressing this problem.

### Objectives:

By the end of this lesson students will be able to:

- Assess the clarity of an author's work through the use of Questioning the Author queries and oral discussion

Corresponding SOL objectives:

WG.5: The student will compare and contrast the distribution, growth rates, and characteristics of human population in terms of settlement patterns and the location of natural and capital resources.

NCSS Standards:

Strand III: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

**Procedure:**

1. Begin the lesson by presenting the concept of Questioning the Author, and why it can be a useful tool to get more out of a text.
2. Give each student a copy of Gore's article. Give them a little bit of background knowledge on the author and the article, including who the author's intended audience likely is. In this case, students are certainly familiar with Gore to some extent, so the teacher might begin this by asking a few students to tell what they know about the author and some of his views. Unlike a textbook, *Earth in Balance* is an extremely long text that was almost certainly not intended for an audience such as this class.
3. As for volunteers to read each paragraph aloud as the rest of the class follows along. Inform them that you may be stopping them abruptly – possibly even mid-sentence – to apply some of the QtA queries. Some of the queries are as follows:

What is the author trying to say?

What is the author's message?

What is the author talking about?

Did the author explain clearly?

Does this follow with what the author told us before?

What does the author assume that we already know?

Why do you think the author tells us this information now?

4. Read through half of the article, stopping at any points in which you can apply some of these queries. With each query, encourage anyone in the class to answer the question or to add to/clarify another student's response. At the end of each paragraph, write the number of the paragraph on the chalk board and ask students what the point of that paragraph was. Write their answer on the board. By the end of the exercise, they will be able to see the basic structure of the article in a simple outline.

5. After reading half the article, have students work with a partner to read the rest of the article and to write down any points in the article that the reader should stop to question the passage. Depending on time, it may be more feasible for the students just to do this with 2-3 paragraphs.

6. Bring the exercise back to the attention of the class as a whole. The teacher will then read through the remainder of the article aloud, telling the students to stop the teacher where they think they should question the author. As the students cut the teacher off, they either apply a query or analyze what the author is saying in the selected passage. It is perfectly fine for students to stop the teacher with simple questions about vocabulary as well. At each stopping point, encourage anyone who has a point to bring it up, moving on only when all dialogue has naturally ceased.

**Resources:**

Gore, Al. "Senator Al Gore on Stabilizing World Population." *Population and Development Review*. Vol. 18, No. 2 (Jun., 1992), pp. 379-383.

**Assessment/Evaluation:**

There is no formal assessment or evaluation for this lesson. Any evaluation would be formative in nature, with the teacher making general observations as to the level of student comprehension. Though if desired, there could be a comprehension quiz following the lesson in order to formally gauge comprehension.

**QtA Article:**

Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit  
Senator Al Gore, 1992  
Section I: Stabilizing World Populations

Consider the plight of several countries, as estimated by the "best case" scenarios projected by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. Kenya, which now has 27 million people, will have within thirty years an estimated 50 million people. Egypt's population, 55 million people today, is increasing by an amount equal to the entire population of Israel every four years; within thirty years it will be at least 100 million people; Nigeria, which already has 100 million people, will have within thirty years at least 300 million people. All three countries are already putting great strains on their natural resources and threatening the integrity of their ecological systems, so it is truly frightening to imagine the impact of doubling or tripling their numbers- not to mention the pitiful quality of life these extra scores of millions can expect. Already new epidemics-from cholera to the Black Plague to AIDS-have emerged in societies knocked off balance by rapid population growth and the consequent disruption of their traditional patterns of living, and the degradation of their surrounding environments. Moreover, in some fast-growing areas like the Sahel, large-scale famines are no longer merely occasional but are now endemic.

The social and political tensions associated with growth rates like these threaten to cause the breakdown of social order in many of the fastest-growing countries, which in turn raises the prospect of wars being fought over scarce natural resources where expanding populations must share the same supplies. Take water, for example. Every one of the fourteen countries that depend on the Nile River is experiencing a population explosion, yet the Nile has no more water flowing between its banks today than it did in biblical times. Similarly, every nation depending upon the River Jordan has a rapidly expanding population, and conflict over that small stream is now beginning to add measurably to the political, social, and religious tensions that have long existed in the area. The Tigris and Euphrates present the same dilemma: limited supplies of water must be shared among several populations, all of whom are growing dramatically.

Consider the problem another way. Imagine that someone invented a miraculous technology that enabled human civilization to cut per capita emissions of greenhouse gases in

half; imagine how much that might reduce our concern about global warming. (Actually, what may be even harder to imagine is that we will have to cut emissions even more than that.) But with world population doubling in less than a half century, all of the potential reductions in greenhouse gases coming from even extraordinary advances in technology would be completely wiped out-and soon greenhouse gases would be accumulating just as rapidly as they are today.

Most of the developing world (with some important exceptions) have high birth and death rates-and rapidly growing populations. By contrast, the United States, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and every nation in Western Europe and Scandinavia now have low birth and death rates-and relatively stable populations. But the nations in the second category, including the United States, were all once in the first category. In fact, most of them did not make the demographic transition until the 1930s, and in some cases even later. But in the developing world, death rates declined dramatically in the 1960s while birth rates did not. Why? When we initially examine the changes industrial countries experienced as they began to achieve relatively stable rates of population growth, we are tempted to focus mainly on the dramatic increases in per capita income and then conclude that rising incomes are the secret. Indeed, incomes in these countries did rise, but they contributed indirectly, not directly, to the changes in thinking that led to smaller families.

A more careful analysis suggests that rising per capita income is also associated with several of the basic causes of demographic transition. *High literacy rates and education levels* are important, especially for women; once they are empowered intellectually and socially, they make decisions about the number of children they wish to have. *Low infant mortality rates* give parents a high level of confidence that even with a small family, some of their children will grow to maturity, carry the family name and genes (and in the belief of some societies, the spirits of ancestors), and provide physical security for their parents when they are old. *Nearly ubiquitous access to a variety of affordable birth control techniques* gives parents the power to choose when and whether to have children.

These are the major factors, but there is a final secret to success. Experience has proven that the crisis can be solved only if it is approached holistically-that is, by addressing all of the critical dimensions simultaneously, with careful attention to how they relate to one another. In this sense, the problem challenges us to understand population growth as a complex system of causes and effects. And because all of the conditions necessary for stability must be present simultaneously and must be sustained-in some cases for several decades-before the transition to stability can begin, the population explosion also poses a challenge to our stamina and persistence. What's required, then, is foresight, maturity of commitment and philosophical cohesion qualities that are much more likely to emerge if the challenge is confronted on a global basis.

***[Stop here. For the rest of the article, students will give the queries.]***

Much confusion, disappointment, and despair have accompanied the effort to control population growth. Failure has usually occurred when politicians did not establish all of the necessary conditions to induce the desired change in the dynamics of the system. For example, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the availability of birth control techniques and devices. But unless a number of other changes take place simultaneously, simply flooding a nation with condoms, pills, IUDs, and sterilization operations will make little difference in the

birth rate. Yet most of the controversy over population policy today is about programs to make birth control more available. Little debate-and even less effort is devoted to literacy and education levels. And even though infant mortality receives a great deal of attention, its connection to population growth is usually ignored.

Unfortunately, many supporters of strong programs for economic development in the Third World assume that the aggressive promotion of birth control and rising national income will eventually cause the population growth rates to stabilize. But too many of these programs increase national income by stripping away whatever natural resources can be quickly sold on the world market, further impoverishing the countryside. Tropical countries, for example, have frequently been encouraged to cut down their rain forests and sell the lumber as a strategy for development, but much of the cash ends up in the hands of a wealthy few (and in bank accounts in industrial countries), leaving the populace even worse off, stripped of their natural resources with little in return. The availability of birth control often has little effect under such circumstances; sometimes, in fact, population growth rates actually increase after this kind of development as the cycle of rural poverty and population increases spins even more rapidly out of control.

Money intended to develop the means for economic growth, and lead to a rise in per-capita income, can also be siphoned away to provide subsistence to larger numbers of new people-and the cycle continues. Moreover, when the countryside is degraded, the migration to urban areas accelerates, and so does the consequent breakdown of traditional social patterns (some of which had served to restrain population growth). Ethiopia is an example of this cycle: although it has received a great deal of development assistance, its leaders have misused it; per capita income has not improved. Its literacy rate is extremely low, and its infant mortality rate is among the highest in the world. So too, of course, is its population growth rate-persistently.

But there are some stunning success stories that show what can happen with a strategic approach. One of the most interesting case studies of demographic transition in the Third World comes from the Kerala province of southwestern India, where the population growth has stabilized at zero even though per capita incomes are still extremely low. The provincial leaders, with assistance from international population funding, developed a plan that is keyed to Kerala's unique cultural, social, religious, and political characteristics and focuses on a few crucial factors. First, they have achieved an extremely high rate of literacy, especially among women. Second, through good health care and adequate nutrition, they have lowered their infant mortality rate dramatically. And third, they have made birth control readily and freely available. The consequences are little short of remarkable: in an area of the world characterized by uncontrollable population growth, Kerala's rate more nearly resembles that of Sweden than nearby Bombay.

The world's strategy for inducing a global demographic transition to lower growth rates should be based on the strategy used in Kerala and elsewhere. Specifically, the Global Marshall Plan should:

*1 . Allocate resources to fund carefully targeted functional literacy programs keyed to every society where the demographic transition has yet to occur. Although the emphasis should be on women, the programs should be directed toward men as well. Coupled with this program should be a plan for basic education, emphasizing simple techniques in sustainable agriculture,*

specific lessons on preventing soil erosion, planting trees, and safeguarding clean water supplies. Although literacy and education have always been seen as worthwhile goals, in the past they have been subordinated to the more general goal of economic development. This effort should now be given top priority.

2. *Develop effective programs to reduce infant mortality and ensure the survival and excellent health of children.* Several decades ago, the African leader Julius Nyerere said, "The most powerful contraceptive is the confidence by parents that their children will survive." In most societies, there is of course no such thing as "social security," and parents often rely on their adult children to care for them in their old age. If they believe there is a good possibility that their offspring will die young, then parents have a strong incentive to have many children in order to ensure that at least some survive into adulthood; besides, in a subsistence economy, children can help gather firewood and water, bring in the harvest, tend the garden and watch over the livestock. Again, programs for reducing infant mortality and improving child and maternal health have been established in the past, but they too have been seen as secondary to the general-if poorly defined-goal of development.

3. *Ensure that birth control devices and techniques are made ubiquitously available along with culturally appropriate instruction.* At the same time, scientists must be charged with stepping up research into improved and more easily accepted contraception techniques. Depending upon the culture, delayed marriages and birth spacing should also be emphasized, along with traditional practices such as breast feeding (which simultaneously improves the health of children and suppresses fertility).

## **Sarah's Lesson Plan**

### **Questioning the Author lesson plan: Federalist Paper # 10 and Anti-federalist writings.**

#### **Context:**

This lesson will be taught to a 12<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. government class at Grafton High School. Government is a required class that all 12<sup>th</sup> graders must pass in order to graduate. Although there are Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) for the course, there is no SOL test at the end of the year. The class I will be teaching this lesson to has 25 students. Unlike other classes I have, this class is reasonably equal in terms of ability level. No student in the period I am teaching this lesson has an IEP. The class is 90 minutes long, but this lesson is designed to take 45 minutes.

During this lesson, students will be reading an excerpt from The Federalist #10, written by James Madison in support of ratification of the Constitution as well as an excerpt from a letter published in the Pennsylvania Packet by three opponents to ratification. The lesson is part of a unit on the foundations of American government.

In this unit, students are exploring the fundamental principles upon which the government of the United States is based, including the rule of law, consent of the governed, limited government and federalism. In their previous lesson, students discussed the critical attributes of federalism namely that a written Constitution divides government power among a national government and several local or state governments.

The U.S. Constitution lays out the framework for the federal government we have today. Following the Constitutional Convention, ratification of the Constitution was the subject of heated debate. The Federalist Papers were hastily written between 1788-1789 by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay in order to convince the people of New York to support the newly drafted U.S. Constitution. Opponents feared that the strong central government described in the document would spell the end of local self-government and mark the beginning of a descent into tyranny and despotism. Proponents of the Constitution supported the creation of a national government that was strong enough to effectively defend itself against both domestic and foreign incursions,

The Questioning the Author strategy is a “during reading” strategy that is meant to help students become more meta-cognitive about their reading. Students are encouraged to pause in their reading periodically to ask questions designed to help them build meaning from a text. Among the suggested questions are:

- What is the author saying?
- What is the author's message?
- What is the author talking about?
- Did the author explain clearly?
- Does this follow with what the author told us before?

- What does the author assume that we already know?
- Does the author tell us why?
- Why do you think the author tells us this information now?

The strategy is intended to be introduced to students during whole class readings, so that students listen to and collaborate with their peers as they grapple with ideas presented in the text. In this whole class setting, teachers can also model for their students the type of thinking that expert readers engage in as they read.

Although the strategy is designed for reading textbooks, the strategy is also appropriate for primary source material like the Federalist Papers and anti-federalist writings, which often contain complex, antiquated language. By encouraging students to stop reading periodically and check their comprehension by asking certain questions, teachers ensure that students are

## **Objectives:**

At the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

Cite the authors of the Federalist Papers and give one reason for their support of the Constitution laid out in Federalist #10 including:

- A strong, large republic is better than a smaller one (like a state) for guarding against the dangers of factions (or special interests)

Cite at least three reasons for opposition to ratification of the Constitution including:

- Concerns that centralized government would be too powerful and tyrannical
- Concerns about individual liberties and the lack of a bill of rights
- Concern about destruction of the States

## **Virginia and U.S. Government Standards of Learning:**

Government 5: The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Constitution of the United States by examining the ratification debates and the Federalist Papers.

## **Assessment:**

Assessment will be informal and consist of teacher questioning.

## **Content and Instructional Strategies**

### **I. Federalist #10.**

Hand out photocopies of Federalist # 10. Explain to students that we will be reading the document aloud as a class, stopping at certain points to ask the author questions. In essence, we will be having a discussion with the authors. Encourage students to raise their hand to stop reading if they have a question they want to ask, and encourage them to ask questions of one

another if they want a classmate to clarify a point. Also mention, that as the teacher, you are going to model the type of questions and thinking that you would like students to ask.

Before reading, review who wrote the Federalist Papers and why. (James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay wrote a series of letters to newspapers in New York in support of ratification of the Constitution. These papers came to be known as the Federalist Papers. Hamilton and Madison knew that ratification by Virginia and New York would be essential for the new government to take hold.)

Refer to the attached excerpt for stopping points and use the following questions as guides for discussion.

1. What is the Madison saying here? What does he mean by factions? What word might we use today?
2. Over what issues does Madison say that men tend to form factions?
3. What is Madison saying here? What does he think is the biggest source of faction?
4. What are some of the different interests that divide a “civilized country?” Whose interests is Madison considering? Whose is he leaving out?
5. What is the principal purpose of legislation according to Madison?
6. What is Madison saying here? How is republicanism a cure against factions?
7. What is Madison saying? What are some of the problems he sees with popular government or direct democracy/
8. Same as above.
9. and 10. What does Madison say about how republicanism differs from direct democracy?

## **II. Findley, Whitehill, Smilie**

Hand out photocopies of Findley, Whitehill and Smilie.

Before reading, have students focus on the authors of the document. Who were they? (Delegates to the Pennsylvania State convention tasked with deciding whether or not to ratify the new Constitution. These three men would have been elected to the state legislature and were writing of their opposition to ratification in the local newspaper, just as if a member of Congress wrote a letter to the editor in a local newspaper today.)

Call on students to read the document aloud to the class. Refer to the photocopy for stopping points as students read, and ask the following questions.

1. What is the author saying here? What is their message?

(The authors are casting doubt on the characters of the men who wrote the Constitution. They also allege that all the Pennsylvania delegates at the Convention were opposed to the Articles of the Confederation. )

2. What is the author's message here? Why do they stress the secrecy surrounding the Constitutional Convention? (Opponents of the Constitution felt that the secrecy in which it was drafted indicated that its authors were going beyond their mandate and .)

3. What are the authors saying here? (They are telling us that they are about to list three reasons for their opposition to the Constitution.)

4. The authors are listing their first point of opposition in this paragraph. What are the authors saying here? (They believe that the size of the country makes a centralized government impractical. Only a "confederation of republics" can work if individual liberty is to be preserved.)

What do the authors mean by "confederation" of republics? How does the idea of a confederation differ from the federalist system laid out in the Constitution? (Teacher prompt: Where have we heard the word Confederacy before? Civil War. What was so important to the Confederate States? - States Rights. Weak limited central government – southerners didn't like protective tariffs, federal funding of internal improvements etc. Confederations are alliances of independent, sovereign states that come together usually for reasons of defense only. ) Who might the "most celebrated writers on government" be?

5. What are the authors saying in this paragraph? (They are worried that the authority of the states will be destroyed.) What kind of language do they use? (Strong language – "annihilate," "iron-handed despotism," "the supremacy of despotic sway.") Is that language justified in the circumstances or do the authors seem hysterical?

What does the paragraph reveal about the individual States' relationship with each other? (If nothing but iron handed despotism can unite the states, they clearly view themselves as very separate from one another.)

6. What is the authors' message in this paragraph? Who are the foreign despots they refer to? What are they referring to in this paragraph? (Authors are telling Americans that they have just won their independence from Britain. Why are they in a rush to cede their freedom to another strong government?) Again, look at the language they use – "embracing America in one chain of despotism."

7. These two paragraphs address the third reason the authors oppose the Constitution. What are they talking about here? (Concerned about the lack of a Bill of Rights.) What are some of the rights they believe should be included in the Constitution?

5. Questions for general discussion: Knowing what we do about American history, were the authors right to be concerned about a centralized government ruling over such a vast expanse of territory? What issues remained unresolved at the convention which would later plague the nation?

### **James Madison, Federalist # 10 Excerpt:**

The latent causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man; and we see them everywhere brought into different degrees of activity, according to the different circumstances of civil society. A zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points, as well of speculation as of practice; **(STOP 1)** an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions, have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good. **(STOP 2)** So strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts. But the most common and durable source of factions has been the various and unequal distribution of property. **(STOP 3)** Those who hold and those who are without property have ever formed distinct interests in society. Those who are creditors, and those who are debtors, fall under a like discrimination. A landed interest, a manufacturing interest, a mercantile interest, a moneyed interest, with many lesser interests, grow up of necessity in civilized nations, and divide them into different classes, actuated by different sentiments and views. **(STOP 4)** The regulation of these various and interfering interests forms the principal task of modern legislation, and involves the spirit of party and faction in the necessary and ordinary operations of the government....**(STOP 5)**

The inference to which we are brought is, that the *causes* of faction cannot be removed, and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its *effects*.

If a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle, which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote. **(STOP 6)** It may clog the administration, it may convulse the society; but it will be unable to execute and mask its violence under the forms of the Constitution. When a majority is included in a faction, the form of popular government, on the other hand, enables it to sacrifice to its ruling passion or interest both the public good and the rights of other citizens. To secure the public good and private rights against the danger of such a faction, and at the same time to preserve the spirit and the form of popular government, is then the great object to which our inquiries are directed..... **(STOP 7)**

From this view of the subject it may be concluded that a pure democracy, by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens, who assemble and administer the government in person, can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction... **(STOP 8)**

A republic, by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking. Let us examine the points in which it varies from pure democracy, and we shall comprehend both the nature of the cure and the efficacy which it must derive from the Union..... **(STOP 9)**

The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended.  
**(STOP 10)**