**Personal Enrichment Independent Inquiry:**

*Essential Questions*

**What is an “essential question”?**

An essential question, in any field of academic study,

* Is *open-ended*: it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
* Is *thought-provoking* and *intellectually engaging*, capable of sparking and engaging discussion
* Calls for *higher-order thinking*, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. (It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.)
* Points toward *important, transferable ideas* within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
* Raises *additional questions* and sparks further inquiry.
* Requires *support* and *justification*, not just a single answer.
* *Recurs* over time: the question can (and should) be revisited again and again.

**What does an essential question look like?**

Look at the following examples, and notice how they meet the criteria outlined above:

**Essential Questions in English**

* Why is this book considered a “classic”?
* How is this book a product of the time and place in which it was written?
* How do the themes in this book relate to the modern world, and to my own life?

**Essential Questions in History and Social Studies**

* Whose "story" is this?
* How can we know what *really* happened in the past?
* How should governments balance the rights of individuals with the common good?
* Should \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., immigration, media expression) be restricted or regulated? When? Who decides?
* Is going to war ever justified? When? Why? Who decides?
* To what extent is our country a democracy?

**Essential Questions in Science**

* What makes objects move the way they do?
* How are structure and function related in living things?
* Is aging a disease?
* Why and how do scientific theories change?
* How can we best measure what we cannot directly see?
* How do we decide what to believe about a scientific claim?

We refer to specific essential questions as "topical" and the more general questions as "overarching." Here are some paired examples of these two types of essential questions:

**Overarching Topical**

In what ways does art reflect culture? What do totem poles reveal about the Haida Gwaii?

What causes the rise and fall of powerful How/why did the Roman Empire collapse?

nations?

What is the role of symbolism in literature? How does William Golding use symbolism to illustrate the central themes of *Lord of the Flies*?

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Having read much of your personal enrichment book, begin formulating some “essential questions”. Eventually, choose one specific “essential question” that you are going to pursue. It may be topical or overarching.

(thanks to Mr. Bazilewich for compiling this!)