

## BEST PRACTICES: Essential Questions

With the adoption of the Science and Social Studies Academic Content Standards in December, many teachers are wondering how they are going to manage to get them all "covered." For elementary teachers who teach all the subject areas, having the responsibility to ensure students learn as many as 100 different indicators for writing, reading, math, citizenship, and science is particularly daunting.

One way to organize instruction and engage students in the content rather than simply plowing through it like a bulldozer is to develop Essential Questions that students explore during a unit or a lesson. Essential Questions are overarching, open-ended questions that are never completely answerable. They are intended to push students to ponder, debate, and discuss big ideas in the classroom, linking academic knowledge and skills to students' interests and challenges. Essential Questions ideally answer the query from students -- "Why do we have to study this?"

Some examples of Essential Questions are:

- Are leaders made or are they born with leadership quality?
- Does history really repeat itself?
- Do we have control over our destiny?
- Can there be good without evil?
- Are all cultures equally valuable?
- If we are all so alike, how do we explain our differences?
- What makes literature great?
- Why is cheating not bad?
- Can we have a family of one?
- Is there any such thing as a moral war?

An Essential Question should provide the framework for a unit, a chapter, or a lesson. It should be the questions that the class keeps coming back to. For more resources see:

1. [Galileo Educational Network Association](#)
2. [Integrated Curriculum](#)
3. [Spartanburg, S.C. District 3](#)