

Asking Thick and Thin Questions While Reading

What Are Thick and Thin Questions?

Thin Questions: Quick, straightforward answers. They're usually answered right in the text with a word, phrase, or simple fact.

Thick Questions: Require deeper thinking. They often have multiple possible answers and ask readers to infer, explain, or extend beyond the text.

Teaching Script (K-5)

Step 1: Introduce the Concept

"Good readers ask questions before, during, and after they read. Some questions are thin—they can be answered quickly, right in the book. Others are thick—they make us think, discuss, and sometimes even research. Both kinds of questions are important, but thick questions help us grow as thinkers."

Step 2: Model with a Read Aloud

- Read a short section aloud.
- Pause to ask aloud:
 - "Where does the story take place?" → Thin
 - "Why do you think the character acted that way?" → Thick
- Label each question and show how they would go on the Wonder Wall.

Step 3: Guided Practice

Introduce the Wonderwall:

"Let's come up with questions together. I'll read, and you think of one question. We'll decide if it belongs under thin or thick, then post it on the wall."

Students share questions, record them on Wonder Strips or sticky notes and place them in the correct section of the Wonder Wall.

Step 4: Independent/Partner Practice

- During independent reading, students write 1 thin and 1 thick question on a strip or sticky note.
- Add them to the Wonder Wall under the Thin or Thick columns.
- Return later to write answers and move strips to the Answered section.

Differentiation Ideas

K-2

- Provide visual question stems (Who? What? Where? for thin questions; Why? How? What if? for thick).
- Let students draw questions or dictate orally before posting.

3-5

- Require text evidence when posting thin questions.
- Challenge students to support thick questions with inferences or connections.
- Have groups “upgrade” thin questions into thick ones before posting.

Struggling Readers

- Allow peer/teacher scribing.
- Use sentence starters: I wonder why... / What would happen if...

Advanced Readers

- Encourage research-based thick questions that connect to history, science, or current events (“How does this connect to history/science?”).
- Ask them to pose thick questions for classmates to investigate and answer.

Classroom Application Ideas:

- **Question Stems Bookmark:** Give each student a bookmark with thin/thick stems for reference during independent reading.
- **Discussion Circles:** Start literature circles or partner talks by requiring 1 thin and 1 thick question from each student.
- **Daily Wonder Routine:** Start or end each day by reviewing one or two posted questions as a class.
- **Partner Share:** Students trade strips and try to answer each other's questions using the text.
- **Exit Ticket:** At the end of reading, ask: Write one thin question you can answer right now, and one thick question you're still wondering about.

Wonder Strip

Question:

- Thick Question
- Thin Question

Name: _____

Answer: _____

Wonder Strip

Question:

- Thick Question
- Thin Question

Name: _____

Answer: _____

Wonder Strip

Question:

- Thick Question
- Thin Question

Name: _____

Answer: _____

Thick Question Stems (answers found in the text)

- Who is...?
- What happened...?
- Where does the story take place?
- When did it happen?
- Which characters are in the story?
- What is the problem?
- How many...?
- What does the character say/do?
- What is the setting?
- What is the solution?

Thin Question Stems (answers require deeper thinking, inference, or research)

- Why did the character...?
- How do you know...?
- What might happen next?
- What if...?
- How would you feel if...?
- Why is this important?
- What lesson can we learn from this story?
- How does this connect to your life/the world/another book?
- What is the author trying to show us?
- What do you think the character learned?