

# The Power of Curiosity

Grade Level: 3-5

## Subjects

Art, English language arts, Social studies

## Themes

Empathy, Curiosity, Compassion

## What Students Will Uncover

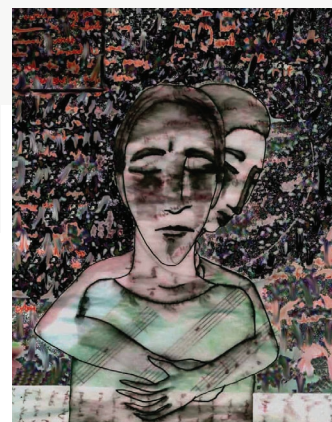
The significance of embracing curiosity and celebrating questions

## Essential Questions

- What does it mean to be curious?
- Why is it important to ask questions?
- How are your questions and answers shaped by your own worldview?

## Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will explore the power of questions. By examining a quote from Rabbi Dr. Ariel Burger's essay, "Learning and Teaching from the Heart in Troubled Times," students will investigate the difference between questions and answers and participate in learning activities to consider the meaning of the word *quest*. This lesson will invite students to develop their curiosity and empathy.



COMPANION ESSAY

## Learning and Teaching from the Heart in Troubled Times

### Materials

- Quote from essay
- "[Asking Questions](#)" cartoon by Grant Snider
- "[I Wonder](#)" worksheet

### SDGs



### Standards & Frameworks

- [SEL Competencies](#)
- [NCSS Themes](#)
- [CCSS ELA Standards](#)

## Key Issue

Embracing questions about the world and ourselves can foster curiosity and empathy.

## Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Explain what it means to be curious.
- Explore the word *quest*, as connected to the word *questions*.
- Recognize that questions are important for learning, growth, and fostering curiosity.

# Background

## Putting the Essay in Context

*This section is intended for the educator and provides information about authors and educators Ariel Burger and Elie Wiesel.*

“Teaching and Learning From the Heart in Troubled Times” is an essay by Rabbi Dr. Ariel Burger, author, teacher, artist, and former apprentice to Elie Wiesel. Ideas for this essay originate from Ariel’s book, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel’s Classroom*, which explores what it means to authentically participate in moral teaching and learning. The book serves “as a moral education in itself—a primer on educating against indifference, on the urgency of memory and individual responsibility, and on the role of literature, music, and art in making the world a more compassionate place.”<sup>[1]</sup> Ariel weaves reflections and insights from Professor Wiesel’s classroom into the essay. Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, author, activist, and Nobel Prize winner, taught a course titled “Literature of Memory”<sup>[2]</sup> at Boston University for close to four decades.

Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, a town that is now part of Romania. During World War II, he was deported with his family to German concentration and extermination camps—including Auschwitz and Buchenwald—where his parents and his younger sister perished. Wiesel’s memory and experience of the war had a profound impact on his life.<sup>[3]</sup> He said that “without the war, I would never have questioned any of

1 Ariel Burger, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel’s Classroom* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018).

2 “[Elie Wiesel: Biographical](#).” From Nobel Lectures, Peace 1981-1990, Editor-in-Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Irwin Abrams, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 1997. This autobiography/biography was written at the time of the award and first published in the book series Les Prix Nobel. It was later edited and republished in Nobel Lectures.

3 Gabe Bullard, “[Elie Wiesel Taught the World How to Confront Atrocities](#).” *National Geographic*, July 2, 2016.

my beliefs. I wouldn't have been involved in action. The event made me realize the urgency of personal commitment."<sup>[4]</sup>

---

**“...without the war, I would never have questioned any of my beliefs. I wouldn't have been involved in action. The event made me realize the urgency of personal commitment.”**

—Elie Wiesel

Wiesel was a human rights advocate who helped to establish the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. He wrote dozens of books and won the Nobel Peace Prize for speaking out against racism and injustice. His autobiography *Night* explores his experiences as a Jewish prisoner in the concentration camps. *Night* is read in classrooms around the world and engages “students’ minds, hearts, consciences,”<sup>[5]</sup> deepens their historical understandings of the Holocaust, and fosters empathy and literacy skills.

Ariel’s essay encourages students to consider that amid the suffering and injustices in the world, there are ways to embrace moral ferocity with self-awareness. An Orthodox-trained rabbi, he received a Ph.D. in Jewish Studies and Conflict Resolution under Elie Wiesel. The Witness Institute—founded in 2019 by Ariel and Elisha Wiesel, Wiesel’s son—is a project dedicated to continuing the work of Wiesel. The Institute, inspired by Wiesel’s life and legacy, empowers emerging leaders to create positive change in their communities to build a moral world.

---

4 Michiko Kakutani, “Wiesel: No Answers, Only Questions.” *The New York Times*, April 7, 1981.

5 “Teaching *Night*.” Facing History and Ourselves: Witnesses to History Series.

# Lesson

## Setting the Stage: Lesson Introduction

*Explore this exercise with students.*

1. Tell students they will explore Grant Snider’s cartoon titled “[Asking Questions](#).”
2. Display the cartoon and read it aloud to students.
3. Ask students: What is your favorite part of the cartoon? Why?
4. Ask students to complete these sentences:
  - I wonder...
  - I’m confused by...
5. Ask a few students to share their responses.
6. What do you enjoy about asking questions? What do you find challenging about asking questions?

## Engaging with the Story

*Introduce students to author Elie Wiesel and explore the meaning of the word **quest**.*

1. Tell students they will read a quote from Elie Wiesel, who was an author and professor at Boston University for forty years. The quote includes the word *quest*.
2. Ask students to define the word *quest* in their own words.
3. Share one definition of the word *quest* with students: “a long or difficult search for something.” The “long or difficult search” can be when a person is looking for something, or it can mean a search for meaning within oneself. Share with students that characters in many stories and books are on a quest. Some characters are searching for a treasure or solving a mystery.
4. Ask students to think about their favorite stories whose characters are on a quest. What are the characters searching for?

## Delving Deeper: Learning Activities

*Encourage students to examine the themes raised in the quote from Elie Wiesel.*

1. Share the following quote with students: “Questions connect us to one another, while answers separate us. Questions open us, while answers close us. There is *quest* in question.”

2. Ask students: What might it mean for questions to “open us” and for answers to “close us”?
3. Ask students to revisit their definitions of the word *quest*. What might it mean for the word *quest* to be inside the word *question*?
4. How was the character in the cartoon “Asking Questions” on a quest?
5. Do you think questions are important? Why? How do you feel when you are asking a question?

## Reflecting & Projecting

*Challenge students to consider the quote’s broader implications and to integrate their knowledge and ideas from various points of view.*

1. Give students sticky notes. Students will write two questions on individual notes. The questions can come from the classroom conversation or they can be new questions. Add the notes to the board to create a list of the questions. In a virtual setting, use Padlet, Google Docs, or Google Slides.
2. Students will select a question that interests them from the list. The question they select can be one of their own or one from their classmates.
3. As an exit ticket, have students write why they chose the questions they did. Students will then begin a short research project to find potential answers to the questions they chose. To guide students in this process, share the [“I Wonder” worksheet](#).

## What’s Happening Now

*Provide students with follow-up activities.*

1. Display Ariel Burger’s original illustration ([from the Yiddish folktale “Sara Chana at the Tip of the Church Tower”](#)) so all students can see it. This illustration accompanies Ariel’s essay.
2. Allow students to respond to the following questions, which are part of Project’s Zero’s Visible Thinking Routine, designed to encourage exploration of a work of art. Tell students to take their time and list all of the ideas that come to mind. Then have students share their responses with the class.
  - What do you see?
  - What do you think about that?
  - What does it make you wonder?



## Take Action

with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

### How will you become an advocate for compassion and curiosity?

1. Watch the video "[Questions to Think About](#)" with Fred Rogers, a well-known children's educator and creator of the PBS television show *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

In the video, Rogers said, "It's good to look, carefully; listen, carefully—that's the way you learn a lot of things, carefully. Look ... and listen." How might looking and listening carefully help you to learn? In what ways does Rogers share how to do this in the video?

2. Rogers said, "In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers."

Ask a friend, family or community member to tell you a story from his/her life. Be sure to listen with your ears and your heart. How does the story make you feel? Share your feelings and thoughts about the story with the person and follow up by asking a question.

*[SDG 3](#): Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*

## Companion Texts

- *The Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth
- *The Blue Pool of Questions* by Maya Abu Al-Hayyat

## Resources

- [Ariel Burger.com](#). (Website)
- Rabbi Dr. Ariel Burger, *Witness: Lessons from Elie Wiesel's Classroom*.
- Warren Burger, *Beautiful Questions in the Classroom*.
- Grant Snider, "[Asking Questions](#)." (Cartoon)
- "[Open-Ended Questions: What Do You Think?](#)" Fred Rogers Center. (Organization)

## Connections to National Curriculum Standards & Frameworks

### **SEL Competencies (CASEL)**

- **Self awareness.** The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.
- **Social awareness.** The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior.
- **Relationship skills.** The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

### **NCSS National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies**

- **Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity.** Questions related to identity and development, which are important in psychology, sociology, and anthropology, are central to the understanding of who we are.

### **Common Core English Language Arts**

- **CCSS.ELA-W.3.4.** With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
- **CCSS.ELA-W.4.4-5.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **CCSS.ELA-SL.3.1-5.1.** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *[grades 3–5]* topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

# We Want to Hear From You

We'd love to hear how you integrate (or plan to integrate) this lesson into your classroom. What were your favorite takeaways and student responses?

[info@globalonenessproject.org](mailto:info@globalonenessproject.org)

[globalonenessproject.org](http://globalonenessproject.org)

[twitter/@goproject](https://twitter.com/goproject)

global oneness project

Stories and lessons for growing minds.

*2020 Global Oneness Project LLC*