

QUESTIONS THAT SPARK LEARNING

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Welcome Back Conference

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SLAV_V 323 - Literature and Film in Eastern Europe

Films and translated literature by Eastern European writers with emphasis on the interaction between politics and literature.

The problem: student papers written by AI

How to meet the challenge?

While computers keep getting better at *answers*, people must get better at *questions*.

A solution: Teach students how to ask better questions as a strategy for deeper learning

Sources & Influences

Tompkins, Kyla Wazana. We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know. [We Aren't Here to Learn What We Already Know | Avidly](#)

Question Formulation Technique.
<https://rightquestion.org/what-is-the-qft/>

What is the QFT?

Developed by the Right Question Institute, the **Question Formulation Technique**, or QFT, builds the skill of asking questions, an essential — yet often overlooked — lifelong learning skill that allows people to think critically, feel greater power and self-efficacy, and become more confident and ready to participate in civic life (<https://rightquestion.org/what-is-the-qft/>)

Fast Food vs. Home Cooking

Teaching **WHAT** (content)

= *giving fast food (convenient, pre-packaged, overly processed)*

→ Learning outcome: students can apply the knowledge in a **similar** situation

Teaching **HOW TO** (skill)

= *showing how to cook*

→ Learning outcome: students can apply the skill in **multiple** situations

Optimal learning = balance of WHAT and HOW

Why Teach QFT?

(The Emotional Side of Questioning)

Challenge: Students are used to being told *what to think*

Switching to asking deep questions can trigger:

- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Anxiety
- Stress
(*real biological reactions to questioning*)

Opportunity: Asking good questions helps students:

- Connect with one another
- Listen deeply
- Be present in the learning moment

QFT requires strong scaffolding throughout the course

Group Activity: Generating Questions

Step 1 – Form Groups (2 min)

4–5 students per group; choose one **note-taker**

Step 2 – View a 1-minute Russian commercial

*Ded Moroz (literally Grandfather Frost) is a Slavic winter holiday figure, similar to Santa Claus. He traditionally brings gifts to children on **New Year's Eve** rather than Christmas. Unlike Santa, who is jolly and round, Ded Moroz is usually portrayed as tall, dressed in a long fur coat, carrying a magical staff.*

Step 3 – Generate Questions (2 min)

Write down as many questions as possible; do **not** discuss them yet

Focus on:

- What bothers or unsettles you
- Odd expressions or moments
- Intuitions / gut feelings (*the ends of intellectual threads*)

Step 4 – Select the Best Question (2 min)

As a group, choose **one best question**

- answerable
- does not rely on information the class doesn't have
- open-ended

Ded Moroz vs. Santa

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Questions Are Bridges, Not Walls

The practice of asking good questions helps students:

- Understand others, not just make themselves understood
- Move conversations from the known to the unknown
- Inspire, spark creativity, and open space for new ideas