

Inquiry

Method

Questioning - pt 2

Interpretive Questions

Author and Me

- 4) **Interpretive** - A question of interpretation asks readers to look carefully at what happens in the piece and consider what it means—what the author wants us to think about.
- Interpretive questions have more than one reasonable answer which can be *supported* from *evidence in the text*—the answer is **based on the piece** (you can “prove” it from the piece).
 - They **do** help us understand the piece better.
 - Interpretive questions are important because they help the reader **focus on the piece**, always digging into it instead of wandering off track (unlike evaluative questions which tend to turn into “what if...” and “maybe...” answers which then lead into opinions not based on any support).

Shoemaker... Interpretive Questions

Why did the rich man think that giving the shoemaker some gold would stop him from singing?

Once upon a time there lived a poor but cheerful shoemaker. He was so happy he sang all day long. The children loved to stand around his window to listen to him.

Next door to the shoemaker lived a rich man. He used to sit up all night to count his gold. In the morning he went to bed, but he could not sleep because of the sound of the shoemaker's singing. One day he thought of a way of stopping the singing. He wrote a letter to the shoemaker asking him to come by.

The shoemaker went at once, and to his surprise the rich man gave him a bag of gold.

When he got home, the shoemaker opened the bag. He had never seen so much money before! He sat down at his bench and began, carefully, to count it. The children watched through the window.

There was so much there that the shoemaker was afraid to let it out of his sight. So he took it to bed with him. But he could not sleep because he was worrying about it. So he got out of bed and went to hide it in the attic, but he was not sure if that was a good place.

Very early in the morning he got up and brought his gold down from the attic. He had decided to hide it up the chimney instead.

But after breakfast he thought it would be safer in the chicken house. So he hid it there.

But he was still uneasy, and in a little while he dug a hole in the garden and buried his bag of gold in it.

It was no use trying to work. He was too worried about the safety of his gold. And as for singing, he was too miserable to sing a note. He could not sleep, or work, or sing—and, worst of all, the children no longer came to see him.

At last the shoemaker felt so unhappy that he seized his bag of gold and ran next door to the rich man.

"Please take back your gold," he said. "Worrying about it is making me ill, and I have lost all my friends. I would rather be a poor shoemaker, as I was before."

And so the shoemaker was happy again and sang all day at his work.

Shoemaker... Interpretive Questions

Answers

- The rich man thought that giving the shoemaker gold would stop him from singing because the shoemaker would be too worried about the gold. (Just like the rich man spends his nights awake counting his money.)
- The rich man thought that giving the shoemaker gold would stop him from singing because he wouldn't have time for anything else, like working. (Just like the rich man only had time for counting his gold and sleeping—no friends or work.)

Evaluative vs. Interpretive

Interpretive and evaluative questions are closely related to each other. The easiest way to figure out which type of question it is, is by looking at the type of answer you get.

- If the answer is *only* supported by real life experiences, it is an evaluative answer.
- If there are at least **two different possible answers**, and **both** of them can be **supported by the story**, then it is an interpretive answer.

It is usually harder to find evaluative questions than fact and guess questions. It is hardest of all to find interpretive questions.

It doesn't matter as much which type of question you ask, but rather that you ask one of the two types of complex questions because they are the questions that lead to more thoughtful analysis of a piece.

What did the author want us to ponder?

What was this story “about”?

Why do you think that—what clues from the story make you think that is what the story is about?

What can we personally learn from this story?

An Unspoken Hunger

Questions

It is an unspoken hunger we deflect with knives—one avocado between us, cut neatly in half, twisted then separated from the large wooden pit. With the green fleshy boats in hand, we slice vertical strips from one end to the other. Vegetable planks. We smother the avocado with salsa, hot chilies at noon in the desert. We look at each other and smile, eating avocados with sharp silver blades, risking the blood of our tongues repeatedly.

This isn't really about avocados or eating, is it?

What is the context in which this was written (is there background info we have to help us, like who is “us” and “we”—who is she with)?

- The author is with her mother.

What kind of relationship does the author have with her mother?

What does “desert” mean?

Why are the two of them in the desert?

What could the desert represent (be a metaphor for)?

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What does “it” refer to?

Does the avocado represent the “it” that is being referred to?

How can “an avocado” (the “it”) be “between” them (what are the meanings for “between”)?

What are the various uses of the word “smother” (a metaphor)?

Why “smother” the avocado?

Why “chilies” at “noon” in the “desert”—that’s a lot of hot, isn’t it? (How does a too much heat make most of us feel)?

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Why knives at the beginning and end?

Why eat avocados with knives and risk cutting themselves?

Why mention “blood”—Isn’t it the tongue that’s at risk, not the blood?

Why smile if their tongues are at risk?

What kind of smile?

Not All Texts Lend Themselves to This Much Questioning

What kinds of pieces do you think would lend themselves to this type of questioning?

The pieces need to be rich, deep, thoughtful.

Is everything always a metaphor in all pieces of writing?

Should some pieces of writing just be enjoyed and not analyzed?

How do you know when a piece is worthy of analysis?