

Social and Emotional Learning

Lesson Title: Good Questions, Part 1

Grade Level: High School

Project and Purpose

In small groups, students analyze portions of Dean James Ryan's 2016 commencement speech to the Harvard Graduate School of Education and teach their findings to the full group.

Essential Question

What is the power of a good question in life?

Materials

- Board/chart to collect group questions.
- Quotations from the 2016 commencement speech by Dean James Ryan to the Harvard Graduate School of Education (slide or handout)
- If possible, a copy of and/or youtube video of Dean James Ryan's 2016 commencement speech, found at: www.gse.harvard.edu/news/16/05/good-questions

Teacher

1. Explain that today's session is all about good questions and the power they can have for our lives.
2. Begin by asking everyone to think of the best question they have ever been asked or ever heard or read. This can be from any situation or source: an interview, a film, a class discussion, a test, a friend, by someone they respect, etc. Ask volunteers to share their questions and collect them on the board/a chart. Be prepared to share your own experience with a good question and copy it to the chart.
3. Ask students why these questions are memorable or make the grade of "the best questions." Again, collect their responses on the board/chart.
4. Tell students that in 2016, Dean James Ryan of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, gave a commencement speech with the very long title, "Three suggestions about asking and hearing good questions, including five examples of essential questions plus a bonus question at the end, the correct answer to which is 'I did.'" Students will use portions of this speech to determine the power of good questions in our lives.
5. Break into five discussion groups and give each group one of the quotations from Dean James Ryan's Commencement speech. Each group should elect a scribe and a presenter and then complete the following tasks:
 - Highlight the most important 3-5 words in the quotation and defend their choices.
 - Connect the quotation to a personal experience or observation.
 - Explain why this quotation should be important to students their age.
 - List the questions this quotation brings to mind for each member of the group.
6. After giving each group time to complete the tasks, ask each group presenter to share their quotation and their information to the full group.

Quotations from the 2016 Commencement Speech

by Dean James Ryan

to the Harvard Graduate School of Education

Instructions

Cut apart and give one quotation to each group

"...asking good questions requires you to see past the easy answers and to focus instead on the difficult, the tricky, the mysterious, the awkward, and sometimes the painful. But I suspect that you and your listeners will be richer for the effort, and that this will be in both your professional and your personal life."

"...well-posed questions make knowledge come to life and create the spark that lights the flame of curiosity."

"Great leaders don't have all the answers, but they know how to ask the right questions — questions that force others and themselves to move past old and tired answers, questions that open up possibilities that, before the question, went unseen."

"For those of you who will be researchers and innovators, remember this observation of Jonas Salk, who discovered and developed the vaccine for polio: "What people think of as the moment of discovery," he observed, "is really the discovery of the question." It takes time and work to discover the question. Einstein famously said that if he had an hour to solve a problem, and his life depended on it, he would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask."

"Asking good questions will be...rewarding in your personal life. Good friends, as you know, ask great questions, as do good parents. They pose questions that, just in the asking, show how much they know and care about you. They ask questions that make you pause, that make you think, that provoke honesty, and that invite a deeper connection. They ask questions that don't so much **demand** an answer as prove irresistible. My simple point is that posing irresistible questions is an art worth cultivating."