



The Driving Question in Project Based learning is often the hardest concept to get across to teachers. Even after a workshop devoted to PBL... questions will come across my email asking for help in constructing and refining the Driving Question.

Why are driving questions so difficult? Perhaps it is the powerful and simple concept they ride upon in a world where teachers have been taught to use so much of their “educationese language” Educators must work at being aware of the important standards in their content area without blurring them out. It is at this point that educators come across that often talked about idea of uncovering, not covering, the standards. Educators are so often told to practice this methodology, but are seldom told how to do it.

This is the power of the Driving Question and its importance in PBL. The Driving Question must be simply stated so that students can uncover the content standards themselves. The Driving Question should not give away the contents standards which students may not really care about. It should engage the students and create wonderment through relevancy to their world. It should drive them to “uncover the standards” Through carefully planned PBL the teacher then facilitates this learning experience. The added bonus of building important 21st century skills is a natural outcome. In order for students to “uncover the standards” they will need to communicate, collaborate, think critically, and provide creative thought.



Describe a typical food chain for the herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores in the deciduous forest biome.



Can we design a menu for the storybook animals that live in the forest?

Describe the important portions of the Constitution and summarize why it is a living document.



How can we create a public service announcement for TV showing why the Constitution is still important today?

What is an environmental brown field and describe why they are difficult to use?



How can we convince the park department that the old oil field near the beach could be valuable?

Name the various reasons that the American Colonists declared war with England



Can we create a play that would convince the colonist in our hometown to declare war on England?

Please feel free to explore the links below to even better understand the Driving Question. Also on the pages that follow you can explore a planning sheet for Driving Questions based on the Tubric Model at www.bie.org and a rubric for assessing your DQ.

- Article defining concepts of the Driving Question - http://www.jetspost.com/eportfolio/pbl/driving_questions.htm
- BIE and Driving Questions http://www.bie.org/diy/getting_started/writing_a_driving_question/
- Practice with Driving Questions http://pbl-online.org/driving_question/dqexplore/dqexplore1.html

Driving Question Form

Name of project _____

Major standards to be uncovered

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____

In the space below choose one of the bullet points by shading in the circle. You can also add in any notes. Section B and D ask you to further define your selection

A. Framing Words

Please pick a selection of framing words below (This begins the question and sets the stage and gets the idea going)

- How can
- How do
- Should
- Could
- What
- _____

B. Person or Entity

Decide who is doing this project. Are the students representing themselves another group in a role playing scenario? In the blank line following each possibility take a moment to be specific. (_____)

- I, we (_____)
- We as... role play, occupation (_____)
- Town, city, county (_____)
- State, nation (_____)
- Community, organization (_____)
- _____ (_____)

C. Action or Challenge

What action will the students be taking? Remember that PBL relies on student doing, building, creating, and innovation.

- Build, create, make
- Design, plan
- Solve
- Write
- Propose, decide
- _____

D. Audience or Purpose

What is the purpose of the final project and/or who will be the audience? The more real world situation will be beneficial. In the blank line following each possibility take a moment to be specific. (_____)

- Real world problem (_____)
- For a public audience (_____)
- For a school (_____)
- For a classroom (_____)
- For an online audience (_____)
- _____ (_____)

In the space below use the items you have selected and expanded on and write your driving question

A _____

B _____

C _____

D _____

Driving Question Rubric

A Driving Question must:

- Be supported by the content standards
- Be understandable and by students
- Is open ended (Answer is not found with a simple search)
- Provide a need to know by students
- Provide engagement and promote inquiry
- Uncover the standards without naming them
- Allow for relevance and connections to real world

Driving Question In PBL

CATEGORY	Score	1	2	3	4	5	Revision
Contains content Standards		No content standards are evident.	Some content, but appears weak.	Appears to have content but also may contain too much outside of content area for purpose of project.	Support of content is evident.	Very strong support of content area with a focus that will support those standards.	
Understandable by students		Students will not understand due to statement of content standards and difficult vocabulary.	Students will have difficulty understanding due to difficult vocabulary.	Students should understand after several readings and some coaching.	Students will understand. May need a short discussion.	Students will undoubtedly understand and be able to relate to the meaning.	
Is open ended		Not open ended because question has obvious answer to students.	Not open ended but students may have to spend a few minutes with a search engine or book.	Has some open ended qualities although does not provide for deep inquiry.	Question is open ended but could provide more focus.	Question is open ended and will promote inquiry and questioning. Provides focus.	

Driving Question Rubric

Provides students need to know		Students will not see any need to know.	Students will not need to know since they already have the answer.	Students may have somewhat of a need to know but may already know where answer is.	Students will have a need to know although it may take discussion and coaching.	Students will have a strong need to know due to relevance and excitement.	
Allows students to uncover standards		No standards to uncover since the question seems to have no relationship to content.	No standards to uncover since they are already stated	Question does have a connection to standards although it may be difficult to uncover.	Question allows for students to uncover the standards with some teacher guidance.	Question allows students to uncover the standards with limited teacher guidance.	
Relevance and Real World Implications		No relevance or real world implication in this question.	Very little relevance of real world Implications in question.	Some relevance of real world implications although it seems contrived.	Question contains relevance and real world implications.	Relevance of real world implications are evident. Connections are apparent outside of school and across curriculum	
Engaging to students		Question does not seem engaging.	Question has very little qualities that lend itself to engagement.	Question seems to have some qualities of engagement but may also take away rigor.	Question should be engaging while emphasizing standards.	Question is engaging, rigorous and provides student voice and choice promoting standards.	