INITIATING INQUIRY

OBJECTIVE: Students learn the purposes and processes of using inquiry and research to deepen understanding. Students initiate inquiry on a topic through collaboratively generating questions to direct and frame research. By the end of Part 1, students will have identified an Area of Investigation and developed Inquiry Questions.

ACTIVITIES

MATERIALS:
Texts #1-3
TCD Checklist
Potential Sources
Area Evaluation Checklist
Posing Inquiry Questions
Research Criteria Matrix

1- EXPLORING A TOPIC
The teacher leads a class exploration of a topic.

2- CHOOSING AN AREA OF INVESTIGATION
The class chooses an Area of Investigation and develops a research question or problem.

3- GENERATING INQUIRY QUESTIONS
Students generate Inquiry Questions to guide their collection of information on their Area of Investigation.

ALIGNMENT TO CCSS

TARGETED STANDARD(S):

W.6.7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
W.6.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.
W.6.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

SUPPORTING STANDARD(S):

W.6.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
RI.6.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
RI.6.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.
SL.6.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

ACTIVITY 1: EXPLORING A TOPIC

The teacher leads a class exploration of a topic.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

NOTE ON UNIT TOPICS

Teachers can use the materials of this unit in multiple ways, depending on their students and curricular context. They can use topics and common texts provided in the Topic Resource Repositories or choose their own topic and texts of similar richness and suitability. If teachers choose to explore their own topic, they can use the repositories as models and the Text Suitability Form (available for free at www.odelleducation.com) to help guide their research and selection of sources. It is important for students to explore the topic for a few days to build an initial knowledge base and to discover various aspects of the topic that are of real interest to them. This exploration should take place in and outside of class—supported by interaction with a few common texts, as well as general discussion of the topic with their peers, teachers, and wider learning community.

By the end of these several days, each student should be able to summarize generally the growing conversation and to articulate a few areas that she or he would like to investigate.

INTRODUCING A TOPIC AROUND A COMMON TEXT

- Begin the research process with the idea of exploring a topic.
- Introduce the general topic.
- Make connections to curricular contexts if relevant, including texts the class has previously read.
- Use **Text #1 from the Topic Resource Repository** to help introduce the topic and to stimulate thinking and interest in the topic.
- Have students share their current knowledge of the topic based on the common text as well as personal previous knowledge: What do they already know about this topic?
- Model posing questions and have students pose their own about the topic based on the common text and their personal interests: What (more) do they want to know about this topic?

BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE AROUND COMMON TEXTS

Using Inquiry Questions is absolutely essential to the research process articulated in this unit. Developing student proficiency for posing general and specific questions to direct inquiry and deepen understanding is a central instructional focus. This questioning process, itself, is iterative and serves specific functions at different stages throughout the process. At this point, students are looking for general information that will help them gain background knowledge and a general understanding of the topic.

- Explain the basic principles of using Inquiry Questions to guide searches. Inquiry Questions can be simply defined as questions that identify things you need to know about a topic and that will help guide your research and analysis.
- Use **Texts #2 and #3 from the Topic Resource Repository** to help students build some general background knowledge about the topic and to practice posing Inquiry Questions.
- You may use the questions posed while introducing the topic as well as additional questions to guide the reading of the texts. Use **Parts I-III (Topic Description, Possible Areas of Investigation, and Guiding Questions) of the Topic Resource Repository** to help students pose questions and generate discussion.
- Have students read the texts in groups of three using Guiding Questions and taking notes on a draft paper for these two basic questions (you may ask students to split the page in two):

      (1) What do I find interesting?   (2) What do I want to learn more about?

ACTIVITY 1: EXPLORING A TOPIC (CONT'D)

POTENTIAL SOURCES TOOL

POTENTIAL SOURCES is a tool where students record general information about potential sources that they may use for the research project. They can also write a brief description of the content and personal comments. An annotated version is provided for teachers.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

RECORDING SOURCES

- Introduce the structure and purposes of the Potential Sources tool. The annotated version of the tool can be used as a guide.

- For the purpose of this activity, students only use part of the tool:

  ◊ Name; Topic; Source (# - Title - Author - Location - Publication Date);
    General content/ key ideas / personal comments

  Later on, they will record more information – related to their evaluation of the source's credibility, richness, and interest – when they use the Assessing Sources handout.

- Remind students that at this point, their notes must serve two main purposes: recording general information about a source, and providing relevant information about its content.

- Model its use with information from **Texts #1-3 from the Topic Resource Repository**.

- When modeling, spend some time explaining different ways that notes for the section on "General Content / Key Ideas / Personal Comments" can be made: quotes, facts and numbers, brief description of the content, personal impressions and evaluation of the quality of the content, etc.

- Have students practice using the Potential Sources tool with **Texts #2 and #3 from the Topic Resource Repository**.

ORGANIZING THE RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

- Instruct students to store all their notes, handouts and Potential Sources tools in SECTION 1of their Research Portfolios: Defining an Area of Investigation.

ACTIVITY 2: CHOOSING AN AREA OF INVESTIGATION

The class chooses an Area of Investigation and develops a research question or problem.

AREA EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The **AREA EVALUATION CHECKLIST** guides the class in the process of evaluating potential Areas of Investigation. The teacher uses the checklist with the class to determine if an area warrants investigation.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

- Based on class discussion of the first few texts, and based on their notes about what they found interesting and what they would want to know more about, explore potential Areas of Investigation within the general topic. **Examples are provided in the Topic Resource Repository**.

- As a class, talk about potential areas of interest students have with respect to the checklist criteria:
    - ◊ Coherence
    - ◊ Scope
    - ◊ Relevance
    - ◊ Interest

- The goal is to choose one Area of Investigation to research as a class.

The class can use the **Area of Investigation developed in the Topic Resource Repository**. If the teacher chooses to explore an Area of Investigation different from the one modeled in the Topic Resource Repository, he/she will have to find and sequence similar text sets to support that area.

- Once the Area of Investigation has been vetted as a class, express it in the form of a problem or overarching question. This gives the research project a clear direction and helps students develop their ability to pose Inquiry Questions.

ORGANIZING THE RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

- Instruct students to store all their notes, handouts and the Area Evaluation Checklist in SECTION 1of their Research Portfolios: Defining an Area of Investigation.

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ACTIVITY 3: GENERATING INQUIRY QUESTIONS

Students generate Inquiry Questions to guide their collection of information on the Area of Investigation.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

The class will now have decided on an Area of Investigation and expressed it in the form of a problem or overarching question. They now brainstorm **more specific questions** about the Area of Investigation that will guide the research.

Use the Posing Inquiry Questions handout to guide students in the brainstorming process and to help students generate, select, and refine their emerging Inquiry Questions.

- Model posing various types of questions about the Area of Investigation, building from students' reading of common texts. **Model texts and questions are provided in the Topic Resource Repository.**

- Work through modeling and discussion to help students frame fruitful questions that require and will sustain research.

- Questioning should be collaborative, either as an entire class or in small groups.

- Students should help each other pose questions exploring as many possible aspects of the Area of Investigation as possible. As with any brainstorming activity, volume should be the initial goal, allowing students to build off each other's ideas.

- If done as an entire class, a scribe (student or teacher) records the questions on the board.

- If technology permits, the collaborative questioning can be done with a Google doc or Smartboard, allowing all the students to share and record their questions electronically.

- Encourage students to build on questions posed by the group.

- Once the brainstorming process is over, use the checklist provided in the Posing Inquiry Questions handout to help students vet and refine their Inquiry Questions.

- Set a quantitative goal: at the end of the process, the class should have a list of 5-10 good Inquiry Questions about the Area of Investigation that they will use to begin research.

- As a set, answering the Inquiry Questions should provide a comprehensive understanding of the Area of Investigation.

ORGANIZING THE RESEARCH PORTFOLIO

- Instruct students to store all their notes, handouts and the list of Inquiry Questions in SECTION 1of their Research Portfolio: Defining an Area of Investigation.

ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES

In this part of the unit students will have produced:

◊   Potential Sources tools

◊   Inquiry Questions

Evaluate these products, as well as their participation and discussion using the Research Criteria Matrix.

The **Research Criteria Matrix** articulates the key proficiencies and habits of the research process that students need to build. The matrix breaks up the skills into categories, articulating the various criteria within each by which to evaluate student performance. These skills and habits span the entire research process and should be tracked to ensure appropriate development. For each criterion, grade-level performance descriptors are provided to support evaluation.

For Part 1, examine student products and performance for initial ability in the following criteria:

•   Setting direction for research

•   Posing Inquiry Questions

Structured and purposeful collaboration plays an important role in this initial part. Developing an understanding that research involves a combination of collaborative and independent skills is an essential objective of the unit. Many of the activities are designed for building collaborative literacy skills.
The **Text-Centered Discussion Checklist** can be a resource for supporting this instruction and evaluation. One strategy for using the TCD checklist in this context is to identify one to three of the criteria for the class as a whole to focus on throughout this unit. As students make their way through the unit, teachers can continually return to this focus. For example, the three "Questioning" criteria (Posing Questions, Responding to Questions, and Making Connections) might be a good natural focus for collaboration skills.