

How to Model Question Writing in Social Studies



Students, I will read this passage about manifest destiny and stop at three different points to write a specific question that can be answered, word-for-word, with information from the text. My questions should be about something important. Watch how I do this.

Examples of Specific Questions

Student(s): Mr. Tralik

Class and Period: Social Studies, Fourth Period Name of Text: Traveling West

Question	Answer	Text Evidence
Why did families travel together in a wagon train?	Families traveled in a wagon train because it was dangerous to travel west without protection.	Page 1, paragraph 2
How long did it take to travel west?	It took more than a year to travel west.	Page 1, paragraph 3
What did people build that helped everyone cross the United States faster?	People built the railroad to help everyone travel across the United States faster.	Page 2, paragraph 2

Students can use extra blanks on the learning log to write questions generated by other students and then answer those questions using the text.



I stopped after this long paragraph to write my question. I read a lot about people traveling in groups and covered wagons and wagon trains, so that is what I wrote my first question about.



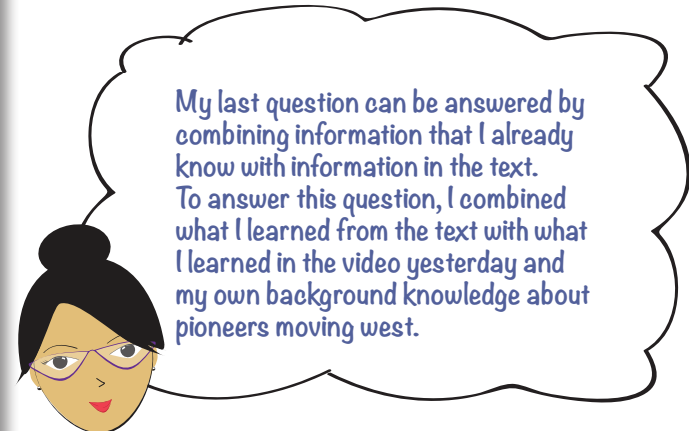
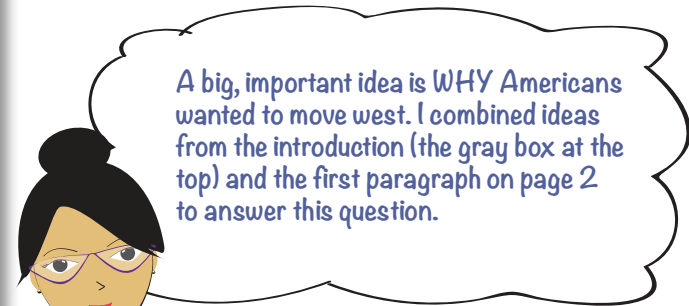
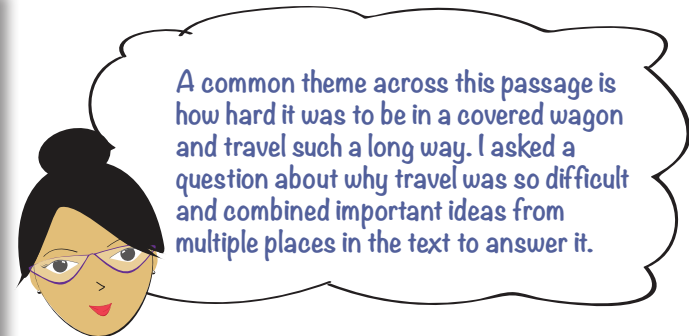
I read the next two paragraphs and stopped to write another question. I read about it taking a long time to reach the West, so that seems like an important fact that I can “flip” into a question.



Finally, I wrote a question about the last paragraph, which talked about the railroad and how much easier it was for people to travel in the next century. That is definitely something important, so I wrote a question about it.

Examples of Wide Questions

Question	Answer	Text Evidence
Why was travel from the East to the West so difficult? Describe several reasons.	Travel from the East to the West was difficult because it was slow and dangerous. People traveled in small wagons with limited supplies. If the ground was muddy, the wagons could get stuck.	Page 1, paragraph 2
Why did people want to travel to the West?	People wanted to travel west to create new communities, spread American customs and find new land for farming. People believed they were destined to move west and expand America. This belief was called "manifest destiny."	Page 1, introduction in gray and page 2, paragraph 1
Do you think people thought the long, difficult journey to the West was worth it? Why or why not?	Yes, I think people thought the hard journey to the West was worth it because once they arrived, they could own land and set up new towns the way they wanted. They probably felt like they had more freedom.	Page 2, paragraph 1 and notes from the video we watched



Name: _____ Class: _____

Traveling West

By Barbara Radner
2005

During the 19th century in America, the idea of "manifest destiny" became very popular. Under this idea, many Americans believed that they were meant to expand throughout the North American continent. The idea of traveling westward to reach new land for farming, as well as to bring American customs and practices to newly acquired parts of the country, became very popular. As you read, take notes on the reasons why Americans moved westward during the 1800s and the struggles that they faced along the way.

- [1] Long ago, when people settled the United States, most lived in the East, and it was hard to travel west. There were no planes, trains, or automobiles.¹ People traveled by wagon or boat, and it took many days to reach a destination. Although it was difficult, in the 1840s, many people traveled far across the United States from the East to the West. They were pioneers.² They would settle in the western part of the country after a challenging journey to a new life.



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Getting to the West was very difficult because there were no roads and there were many obstacles³ to travel. People traveled in groups, and each family would buy a covered wagon, which is a big wooden wagon with a kind of tent on it. It was small, about the size of an automobile, but it would be home for the whole family while they traveled to their new home. Each family would pack the tools and supplies they needed to build a new life in the West. They would have to fit all they took in their wagon, so they would bring only the items that were essential.⁴ It was dangerous to try to travel west without protection, so families would travel together, combining their wagons into what was called a wagon train. It was a group of wagons all going the same way. To prepare, they would meet with other families to plan their trip, choosing a route based on the travels of others. When the families started the trip, they did not know each other, they only had in common that they were leaving the East to start a new life in the West. They met when the trip began, and they would spend more than a year together, so they got to know each other well. Sometimes they would borrow tools from each other, and sometimes they shared food. When the wagons encountered⁵ a problem, such as a storm that caused wagons to stick in muddy holes, they would solve it together.

STOP AND WRITE A QUESTION

It would take more than a year to reach the West, and many things happened along the route. The families sometimes had babies along the way, which delayed the progress as the wagon train would stop for a few days to help the mother with the baby. Then they would keep going, persisting⁶ whatever the weather, because they knew they had a long way to travel and could not delay long.

1. cars
2. **Pioneer (noun):** someone who is one of the first people to do something, such as move to and live in a new area
3. **Obstacle (noun):** something that blocks one's way or prevents progress
4. **Essential (adjective):** absolutely necessary
5. **Encounter (verb):** to continue firmly in spite of difficulty, opposition, or failure

When the wagon train got to the West, the families would settle there, building homes, starting farms. They would create communities, and instead of being partners in a trip they were collaborators⁷ in community. Those communities would grow into towns, and then some would expand into cities, from a wagon train to a metropolis.

STOP AND WRITE A QUESTION

- [5] In the next century, people built a railroad that crossed the United States. By 1900, there were many more people in the West, and thousands of people came west by train. A trip that had taken months now took passengers a few days of comfortable transit. The railroad brought many changes, and the pioneers became legends as the country developed into the nation of today.

STOP AND WRITE A QUESTION

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6. **Persist** (*verb*): to continue firmly in spite of difficulty, opposition, or failure
7. **Collaborator** (*noun*): a person who works with others on a project or task

Question Log

Student(s): _____

Class and Period: _____ Name of Text: _____

Question	Answer	Text Evidence

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