

Ladders of Questioning

Level One – Literal - Factual

Level One questions can be answered explicitly by using facts in the text or easily accessible information in other texts. They are fact-based.

Good answers lead to an accurate and complete summary of text.

" If it's a Level One question, you can literally put your finger on the answer in the text."

Level Two – Interpretive - Inferential

Level Two questions are textually implicit, requiring analyzing or interpreting specific parts of the text. They are inference-based. You must read between the lines for the answers.

Good answers lead to an identification of the significant patterns.

" If it's a Level Two question, you can put your finger on the evidence to support your answer."

Level Three – Experiential - Connecting

Level Three questions are open-ended and go beyond the text. Bring your own personal experience into the discussion in addition to evidence from the text. These questions will provoke discussion of an abstract idea or issue.

Good answers lead to an appreciation of the text and further discussion.

" You don't have to have read the piece to answer a Level Three question, but it helps."

Passage taken from Eugenia Collier's "Marigolds"

I leaped furiously into the mounds of marigolds and pulled madly, trampling and pulling and destroying the perfect yellow blooms. The fresh smell of early morning and of dew-soaked marigolds spurred me on as I went tearing and mangling and sobbing while Joey tugged my dress or my waist crying, "Lizabeth, stop, please stop!"

And then I was sitting in the ruined little garden among the uprooted and ruined flowers, crying and crying, and it was too late to undo what I had done. Joey was sitting beside me, silent and frightened, not knowing what to say. Then, "Lizabeth, look!"

I opened my swollen eyes and saw in front of me a pair of large, calloused feet; my gaze lifted to the swollen legs, the age-distorted body clad in a tight cotton nightdress, and then the shadowed Indian face surrounded by stubby white hair. And there was no rage in the face now, now that the garden was destroyed and there was nothing any longer to be protected.

"M-miss Lottie!" I scrambled to my feet and just stood there and stared at her, and that was the moment when childhood faded and womanhood began. That violent, crazy act was the last act of childhood. For as I gazed at the immobile face with the sad, weary eyes, I gazed upon a kind of reality which is hidden to childhood. The witch was no longer a witch but only a broken old woman who had dared to create beauty in the midst of ugliness and sterility. She had been born in squalor and lived in it all her life. Now at the end of that life she had nothing except a falling-down hut, a wrecked body, and John Burke, the mindless son of her passion. Whatever verve there was left in her, whatever was of love and beauty and joy that had not been squeezed out by life, had been there in the marigolds she had so tenderly cared for...

[T]here are times when the image of those passionate yellow mounds returns with a painful poignancy. For one does not have to be ignorant and poor to find that his life is as barren as the dusty yards of our town. And I too have planted marigolds.

Level One: Literal Questions

1. Describe Lizabeth's actions in this scene.
2. What are the meanings of the words "sterility," "verve" and "poignancy"?
3. How is Miss Lottie described?
4. What sense words are used to describe the marigold garden?
5. What does Lizabeth do right after she destroys the flowers?

Level Two: Interpretive Questions

1. Why do you think the narrator destroyed the marigolds?
2. Why is Lizabeth unable to stop her actions?
3. Why did Miss Lottie so tenderly care for the marigolds?
4. Why has Lizabeth's understanding of Miss Lottie changed?
5. How do you interpret the last line of the story?
6. Can you identify any stylistic devices? How do they add meaning to the passage?

Level Three: Experience-Based Questions

1. Can you think of a time when your anger got out of control? What were the consequences of your behavior?
2. Have you had an experience that changed your perception of another person? (i.e. divorce, failures, sickness)
3. What information can you find about the Great Depression? How is this information significant to this story?
4. When does childhood end and adulthood begin? Is this the same for all people?