

Section I A: What is the Essential Question in the Theme?

For a Common Core Unit to be successful, the theme must allow for many different areas of exploration and should relate to some facet of the students' lives so that it will capture their interest and give the unit a real-life application. When the curriculum connects with the students' lives and experiences, they are more likely to internalize what they learn. The theme should be developed around an essential question or big idea. A central theme is a statement or open-ended question that communicates the content standards in a way that engages students by connecting learning to prior knowledge, skills, experiences, beliefs and/or customs. It should focus on a life issue, problem or question that provides a meaningful purpose for student learning. A unit organizer is general and relates to some big idea, thereby allowing for transferability of knowledge. This makes a unit theme important in formulating a course of study.

The essential question is the driving force behind the unit that supports instructional delivery as it refocuses the attention to what is important about the unit. For example an essential question for a particular unit might be "How Literature Effects Our Lives." As a theme for the unit, the statement becomes the introductory clause for each lesson. The teacher would consistently and periodically state to the class, "In today's lesson, we are going to further explore ways that literature affects our lives." The restatement of the essential question or theme of the unit then drives instruction and assessment for a particular unit of study.