

## Learning Expeditions: Designing Compelling Topics and Guiding Questions

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### Overview

The compelling topic articulates the content of the learning expedition, links the content to big ideas, and specifies the context in which that content will be studied. Developing a compelling topic is the first step in planning learning expeditions. The compelling topic is a cohesive package that includes in-depth investigations and one or more guiding questions that connect those investigations. In-depth investigations engage students in long-term study of one aspect of the compelling topic. Compelling expedition topics take content standards and shape and organize them to make them engaging and accessible to students. They motivate students to become experts, to generalize to big ideas, and to experience how depth leads to breadth.

## BENCHMARK 2:

### DESIGNING COMPELLING TOPICS AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

#### A. Choosing and Focusing the Topic

1. Specifying the context in which the content will be studied (e.g., a specific setting, event, place, or issue) focuses the topic.
2. The topic leads to in-depth investigations.
3. The topic often focuses on issues of diversity, equity, and social and environmental justice.
4. The topic often invites students to consider multiple perspectives (e.g., on gender, race, social class, or controversial scientific issues).
5. Community issues often focus the topic and require students to interview witnesses and experts and to create products that meet a real need.

#### B. In-Depth Investigations

1. Each in-depth investigation is a long-term study of an aspect of the topic.
2. In-depth investigations shape and organize content standards.
3. Big ideas, key concepts, and skills are articulated and explicitly taught within each in-depth investigation.
4. In-depth investigations lead students to become experts in a particular discipline.
5. The design of the investigation leads naturally to products, texts, fieldwork opportunities, resources, and experts.
6. Scaffolding for daily lessons flows from the design of the investigation (e.g., mini-lessons, workshops, skill instruction).

#### C. Guiding Questions

1. Guiding questions synthesize the big ideas, the theme, and the “so what” of the in-depth investigations.
2. Guiding questions connect the in-depth investigations.
3. Guiding questions are open-ended (i.e., do not have one right answer) and lead to multiple perspectives.