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## Picture Books, Posters, and Post-Its: Summarizing Text to Stage the Compelling Question

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### Abstract

The authors describe how to plan and implement an IDM Staging Activity using picture books. This cross-discipline activity is designed to motivate, foster curiosity, and activate background knowledge among students grades 3-12. Further, the authors discuss the importance of staging the compelling question and the significance of summarizing skills to social studies.

**Keywords:** Inquiry Design Model, staging activity, picture books, summarizing

The Inquiry Design Model (IDM), inspired by the C3 Framework, leads students through an inquiry process to answer a compelling question. IDMs have four major components completed in the following order: staging the compelling question, formative tasks, summative tasks, and taking informed action. The staging activity captures student interest and introduces the compelling question. Next, applying disciplinary tools to dig deep into authentic sources, students complete formative tasks which are designed to support the overarching compelling question. Once the formative tasks are completed, students construct an argument “that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from the sources [from the formative tasks]” (Grant, Lee, and Swan, 2017). Finally, student may take informed action through connecting the compelling question to civic engagement. All components are intentionally and cohesively aligned to the overarching compelling question.

It must be noted that IDM is not a prescriptive program that dictates to the teacher questions and tasks for instruction. Instead, the model serves as a structure upon which teachers can apply their creativity and expertise in designing effective curricular inquiries. Teachers craft their own compelling questions, design the supporting questions and tasks, and research and select sources that hold student interests and provide information to fuel the inquiry (C3 Teachers, 2021). Below (see Figure 1) is a template that outlines the components of the IDM.

This article focusses on one IDM component, staging the compelling question, using a collaborative picture book summarizing activity. It describes the importance of staging the compelling questions, the literary skill of summarization, and the rationale for using picture books in social studies instruction. Finally, the article provides step-by-step instructions for planning and implementing the activity.

Figure 1. IDM Three Supporting Question Template

Compelling Question?	
Standards and Content	
Staging the Compelling Question	
<b>Supporting Question 1</b>	<b>Supporting Question 2</b>
<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	<b>Formative Performance Task</b>
<b>Featured Sources</b>	<b>Featured Sources</b>
<b>Source A:</b>	<b>Source A:</b>
<b>Supporting Question 3</b>	
<b>Formative Performance Task</b>	
<b>Featured Sources</b>	
<b>Source A:</b>	
<b>Summative Performance Task</b>	<b>ARGUMENT:</b> [Insert Compelling Question] Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that evaluates the need to study, remember, and/or celebrate this expedition using specific claims and relevant evidence from sources while acknowledging competing views.
	<b>EXTENSION.</b>
<b>Taking Informed Action</b>	<b>UNDERSTAND</b> <b>ASSESS</b> <b>ACT</b>

Adapted from Grant, Lee, and Swan as cited in “The Inquiry Design Model” by C3 Teachers (2021). <https://c3teachers.org/inquiry-design-model/>

### Staging the Compelling Question

One of the first activities students complete in the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) is staging the compelling question. According to the IDM model, “staging the question activities introduces students to the ideas behind the compelling question in order to generate curiosity in the topic” (Grant, Lee, Swan, 2107). Given the limited time in a hectic school year, teachers may feel reluctant to spend planning time developing or finding staging activities. Instead, they may be tempted to begin with the supporting questions and formative tasks, mistakenly assuming staging less worthy of precious class time. Regardless of time constraints, teachers should retain this valuable activity in the IDM because staging is integral to IDM. In fact, staging the compelling question is so integral to IDM, when Swan and Lee (2018) introduced their more condensed Focused Inquiry Model with fewer supporting questions, they retained staging the compelling question “as is” (p. 134) because staging is a precise activity that serves multiple purposes. Staging the compelling question is “the establishing shot” (Lee, 2017) in an inquiry

and can pique student curiosity and motivate them to learn more. Moreover, staging helps students tap into their background knowledge, knowledge that will serve as foundational schema to build on throughout the inquiry (Swan & Lee, 2017). In short, staging should get students thinking about what they already know as well as inspire them to think about what they want to know.

Most staging activities are designed to last fewer than 15 minutes; however, this staging activity is comparatively longer than most. Implementation should be estimated at approximately 30 to 40 minutes and may last an entire period. Once students are familiar with the steps of the activity, it can be repeated in a different inquiry using different picture books. However, because it is a longer activity, it is not recommended for Focused Inquiries which are shorter in duration. Instead, it will be more effective in inquiries with four formative tasks. Although the staging activity described in this article serves the purposes outlined above, it meets another objective. This activity will help students practice a crucial literacy skill they can apply to multiple social studies texts.

### **Summarizing**

Teachers often observe students locking in on one or two interesting details they have read in an article or book without being able to summarize the entire reading. Although they may be pleased by the enthusiasm students show for these facts, the main idea that binds together the text must not be lost in instruction. When students read text and are able to register the main idea-what the text is mostly about- they build and strengthen schema. Think of schema as file folders in their minds where related facts can be connected and organized. Summarizing, connecting the main idea to supporting details in a concise statement, helps create and maintain those folders, all relevant to the inquiry process (Serravallo, 2015). Goudvis, Harvey, and Buhrow (2019) sum up the importance of summarizing text to the inquiry process:

Kids process and distill information to understand it and make it their own. They add to their store of knowledge, merging new information with what they already know. We may come to understand a new perspective, a new line of thinking, and come up with original ideas based on what we read, listen to, and view. (p. 19)

Summarizing text can be a difficult task, especially for struggling readers, because it calls on students to sift through all they have read, identify not only what is most important in a text, but to also leave out what is not important. Moreover, students must then provide that information in their own words (Johnson & Keier, 2010). In short, when teachers ask students to summarize, they ask them to do several tasks at once.

Teachers who only teach social studies content may not know if their students have mastered the skill of summarizing. If students struggle to recount what a text is mostly about, identify the main idea, or list random facts that seem disconnected, they may need a summarizing strategy to complete the activity. If this is the case, the social studies teacher might collaborate with a reading teacher to identify strategies to apply to instruction or adopt strategies

from *The Reading Strategies Book* (Serravallo, 2015). Although written for students K-8, many of the strategies described are appropriate for high school students. This will be a valuable use of instructional time because, as mentioned above, summarizing is a vital skill used when processing historical sources and evidence. Students will be able to reuse the strategy many times throughout the year.

### **Picture Books**

Thanks to the internet, there exists a plethora of text to communicate multiple social studies topics at every reading level. Why then select picture books, which may be less accessible, for staging the compelling question? Picture books pack a whole lot of information in less time. They are usually composed of less text than chapter books or textbooks so they can be read quickly. This is significant to staging because these activities should be precise and relatively fast (Swan and Lee, 2017). Picture books also provide a vast amount of information in less space than other media. They tell a story through both words and images, reinforcing the old adage *a picture paints a thousand words*. Whether through illustrations or photographs, picture books can establish historical context through images of clothing, technology, or architecture. Picture books can poignantly express character expression and emotions. They may also provide rich symbolism that speaks to the reader's emotions, sometimes inspiring or disturbing. This is especially important to the staging activity which may be designed to "get kids off-balance a little bit...and not comfortable" (Lee, 2017). Moreover, picture books provide vivid visual images that today's students have become accustomed to thanks to media literacy. For this reason, students, even adolescents, may find picture books more attractive than stand-alone text (Costello & Kolodziej, 2006), even though these older readers may not realize many picture books are written solely for adolescent readers. Finally, picture books can assist struggling readers because clues in the illustrations provide support for comprehension.

### **Selecting Appropriate Picture Books**

Using picture books to stage will mean assembling a text set, a collection of 5-6 books that share a theme or topic, each with a different perspective or experience related to the compelling question. These multiple perspectives provide students an opportunity to compare or contrast views (Bersh, 2013). Books should be selected to encompass the spirit and meaning of the compelling questions. These books can peak student interest, activate background knowledge, and create buy-in for the compelling question.

Critically consider the authenticity of perspectives presented in each book. It is crucial to provide students books that are void of stereotypes or tokens characters. An effective guide to selecting books that provide authentically lived views can be recommended by trusted organizations who bestow awards on quality children's and youth adults' literature (Boyd, Causey, & Galda, 2015; Sharma & Christ, 2017).

Keep in mind picture books are valuable but expensive. As all seasoned teachers know, materials chosen for an activity may not always work as planned. It would be wise to borrow books from the school or public library the first time they are used in this staging activity. If found effective, they can be purchased to repeat the staging activity again in future classes.

Prior to instruction, read every book carefully and write a summary for each. Consider how the book summary relates and connects to the compelling question. If after reading the book and summarizing, the purpose and connection are not clear, search for a different text. Not every book on the same topic will effectively stage the compelling question. See Table 1 below for a sample list of texts appropriate for a staging activity for an IDM related to the American Civil Rights Movement.

**Table 1**

*Book Sample*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Publisher, Year</b>	<b>Awards</b>
The Other Side	Jacqueline Woodson	G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers, 2001	<i>International Literacy Association Teacher's Choice Award</i>
Freedom School, Yes!	Amy Littlesugar	Philomel Books, 2001	<i>Coretta Scott King Award, Caldecott Medal</i>
Freedom Summer	Deborah Wiles	Aladdin; Reprint edition, 2005	<i>Coretta Scott King-Joe Steptoe Award</i>
Ruth and the Green Book	Calvin Alexander Ramsey	Carolrhoda Books, 2010	<i>Skipping Stones Honor Award, 2011, Winner, Multicultural and International Society of School Librarians International Book Awards</i>
Martin's Big Words	Doreen Rappaport	Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2001	<i>Caldecott Medal</i>

### **Grouping Students and Assigning Roles**

Cooperative learning is an effective classroom approach if effectively organized by clear roles and expectations (Kagan & Kagan, 2017). This cooperative activity assigns students



separate roles with specific instructions. In doing so, students clearly understand what they are expected to do, have a significant role to complete in the group, and have a high level of accountability for completion of tasks.

Divide the class into groups with no less than three but no more than five student members. Do not randomly assign students to a group. Instead, consider classroom social dynamics, interests, and abilities and consider the role each member will play so each group has a mix of abilities and skills to match the duties each will perform (see Table 2). Each additional group will consume more classroom time during the *Post It Walk* and *Wrap Up*. Also, groups with fewer members will force students to take on more than one role, creating more work for each group member. This may lead to longer *Summary* and *Debriefing* sessions. Conversely, fewer groups will require more members and may leave some members with nothing to do. Although this activity has four roles, two students may complete one role. For example, a group may have two readers, dividing the book into two parts for the reading.

**Table 2**

*Group Roles*

<b>Role</b>	<b>Task/Responsibility</b>	<b>Look for a student who...</b>
<b>Reader</b>	Reads the book aloud to the group, clearly and fluently, providing time to show the group illustrations. In larger groups, there may be more than one reader, dividing up the book into parts.	-is a fluent reader and - enjoys reading aloud. -is most likely to volunteer to read in class.
<b>Poster Creator</b>	Creates a poster to communicate the picture book's summary statement in bullets or paragraph form.	-has legible handwriting and enjoys writing for others.
<b>Reporter</b>	After the book is read aloud, leads the group through the discussion and takes notes on ideas that should be included in the summary.	-stays on task, detailed, and a fast writer. -is a natural leader and can keep the group on task.
<b>Presenter</b>	Reads aloud the post-it notes to the group left by other class members and facilitates the debriefing.	-is comfortable reading and speaking in front of the class. -is concise and specific when presenting.

## Facilitating the Staging Activity

### Step 1: Poster Summaries

Give each group one copy of a different picture book from the text set. The *Reader* reads the book aloud, displaying the illustrations so that all the group members can see. After the reading, the group members will discuss what they thought the book was mostly about. The group discusses at least three supporting details they felt were most important and that connected to the main idea. The *Reporter* notes on the discussion, recording everyone's ideas. The group then agrees on the main idea and three supporting details, and the *Poster Creator* writes a concise summary on chart paper. The *Poster Creator* can bullet the summary or write in a full paragraph.

Provide no more than 15 minutes for the groups to complete the summarizing tasks. Prior to the activity, determine where each group will work and where they will display their poster when finished. To help groups stay on task and aware of time constraints, keep a timer and let the groups know when 10 minutes have elapsed then 14 minutes. Groups should complete and display their posters within the 15 minutes time limit. Walk around the room and provide support and feedback for the task as necessary.

### Step Two: Post-It Walks

When all the summaries are completed and displayed, students ten minutes to walk around the room individually and read all the summary posters from other groups, recording their responses on post-it notes. They must respond to every summary, attaching post-it notes to the corresponding summary poster. They may respond with an observation about the summary, a question they may have about the book or the topic, or a suggestion to strengthen the summary. In order to encourage individual and original responses from every student, notes should be written on the "sticky" wrong side of the post-it so that when they are attached to each poster responses cannot be seen by others. Students must sign their names to the notes to foster accountability. As with the poster summary step, keep an eye on the timer and remind students when the time is almost up.

**Table 3**

#### *Materials*

Material	Role and Purpose	Number per group
Chart paper	<i>Poster Creator</i> : displays picture book summary	1

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	statement. If chart paper is not adhesive, provide tape for hanging the poster.	
Markers	<i>Poster Creator</i> : Displays the picture book summary statement	1-3
Pencil or pen	All group members (one per student): comment on book summaries	1-5
Paper	<i>Recorder</i> takes notes on summary discussion	1-2 sheets
Post-Its	All group members: comment on other book summaries	1-2 packs
Thematic Picture Books	<i>Reader</i> reads the book aloud to the group	1

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### Step Three: Group Discussion on Feedback

When the *Post-It Walk* is completed, group members return to their group's posters to view the responses left by their classmates. The *Presenter* collects the post-it notes and reads aloud the contents of each to the group. The group then discusses the feedback they have received from class members and decide how to address questions. Based on feedback, they may decide to revise their summaries before presenting to the whole class. Groups have only five minutes to complete this task. If groups are struggling with the task, prompt with, "What would you like to add to your summary or include about your book that you think the class should know that you did not already have in your poster?"

### Step Four: Debriefing

During the debriefing, the *Presenter* from each group briefly discusses if and how they would alter their summaries based on the observations and suggestions left by classmates. The *Presenter* also answers the questions posed by their peers if the information was provided in the group's picture book. Unanswered questions on the topic are recorded on the board or chart paper by the teacher.

Teacher involvement in the *Debriefing* is critical because this discussion transitions to revealing the compelling question. If needed, refer back to the book summaries written during planning to help direct the discussion. Capitalize on the curiosity created by the questions the groups cannot answer at the end of the *Debriefing*.

## Step Five: Wrap-up

This is the moment to reveal the compelling question. Give students a minute of quiet time to think about the compelling question and silently make connections to their summaries. Encourage students to reflect on how they are related. Draw the students' attention back to the list of questions they have not answered. Based on what they have already learned from summaries, challenge students to discuss additional questions they would like to answer during the inquiry.

## Virtual Modifications

This activity is easily modified for virtual instruction in Zoom. During group work in *Poster Summaries* and *Group Discussions on Feedback*, place students in Zoom Breakout Rooms. Obtain digital books for students to read online and assign a book to each *Reader*. The *Reader* can screen share in breakout rooms during the read aloud. *Post-It Walks* can be modified for Jamboard or Flipgrid. Create a Jamboard and assign each group a slide. Each *Poster Creator* can use the text tool to record the summaries on their assigned Jamboard slides, and classmates can use the sticky note tool to attach responses to each summary.

Students may prefer to create video responses to summaries. *Poster Creators* can post summaries in Flipgrid and classmates can record video responses to each summary. *Debriefing* and *Wrap Up* can take place back in the Zoom Main Room.

Overall, using a collaborative picture book summarizing activity captures student interest, makes direct connections to compelling question, and provides practice in summarizing text, all characteristics of effective staging activities. Although summarizing text is integral to the analysis of written sources, it is a skill students struggle with at every grade level. However, with practice through the described activity, students can develop this crucial skill.

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