

THE ASK PROGRAM

University of Michigan-Dearborn

The ASK program (Author Specialists and Knowledge) occurs each semester as part of an undergraduate Literature for Children and Youth class. The participants include university students, as well as later elementary through high school students depending on the selected literature work. The purpose of the program is to take readers beyond the confines of a novel, relating the information from their reading in a personal way to their own immediate situation. For as part of the process, readers draw on their own writer's voice, as they journal through their reading.

Interviews are conducted with authors of children's books and with "specialists" whose occupations, interests and experiences bring credibility or a better understanding to a particular literature selection. The interview focus from these books has been on such social issues as ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, homelessness in America, the Vietnam War, media responsibility, racial prejudice and animal rights. In addition to these social issues, through interviewing authors, readers are able to explore such evaluative literary aspects as the development of character, plot, setting, theme and writing style. The following children's books have been selected in past interviews: *The Devil's Arithmetic*, *Charlie Pippin*, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham- 1963*, *Monkey Island*, *Nothing about the Truth*, *Maniac Magee*, *Wringer*, *Circle of Gold*, *Adem's Cross*, and *Julie of the Wolves*. Through the interviewing steps of the ASK program, students develop questions to be asked of either the selected author or specialist. The interviews are held on the university campus or at one of the metropolitan area schools or county teacher centers referred to as Intermediate School Districts (ISD's). Two ASK programs with Newbery authors will be featured at the Michigan Reading Association in March.

Recently, most of the interviews have been conducted using distance learning technology, connecting authors and specialists brought to campus with sites in the metropolitan area. The ASK process is learned through inservice workshops presented at the school site, county ISD's, at conferences or on the university campus. In some instances, university students who have been trained in the program, visit selected schools and work with teachers and their students preparing them for planned interviews.

**The ASK Program (Authors Specialists and Knowledge)
The Literature Based Interview Process
Dr. Raymond Kettel, University of Michigan-Dearborn**

1. Read the book. For elementary school age students it may be helpful if you read the book to the class while your students read along.
2. Keep a journal. When you have finished reading for the day, you and your students should individually write down your thoughts. It might be a scene that you can identify with, or an idea that you care about. It might be an event that upsets you or a passage that piques your curiosity. Respond to a part of the story that makes you laugh, makes you cry, makes you want to keep reading. Don't summarize a segment, but tell how it makes you feel. Enter the world of voice journaling. Teachers should model journal writing. Find a passage that makes you remember something in your personnel experience. Use the overhead to write your journal and share what in the book triggered that response.
3. Write questions. When you have finished reading the book and made your final journal entries, it will be time to start writing questions. Students should write the chapter and page number that corresponds with each question. By reviewing their journal entries, the students should be able to write questions about those parts of the story that most interested them. If you are working with younger students, we recommend that you have the students write questions every day. The purpose of this exercise is to better understand the story in terms of:
 - what the story is about
 - who the characters are, what they are like
 - where the story takes place
 - how the author sounds or uses words
 - what the broad issues within the book are
4. Show examples. As the teacher, you should also write some questions and show them to the students so that they can see how it should be done. Teachers need to model their thinking process. What prompted you to ask that question?
5. Place the students in pairs and encourage them to select their best four questions. Each pair should select only four questions that will be presented to the class.
6. Conduct a round robin elimination process. When your students have selected their best four questions, ask each group to read their questions to the class. Eliminate duplicate questions among the groups.
7. Revise the questions. When the elimination process is completed, each student should have at least one unique question to ask in the interview. It is okay if the question has been rewritten to include aspects of duplicates that were eliminated.

8. Place the questions in order. Based on the chapter and page number of each question, place the questions in order so that the interview is being conducted, the class and the author are essentially working through the book. You should have more questions than you think you will use.
9. Conduct a practice session. Have each student stand and read his or her question in a confident manner. This is very important. This practice session will prepare the students to interview the author or expert.
10. Conduct the Interview. One the day of the interview, introduce the author/expert to the class. Each student should stand and ask his or her question so that the guest can see and hear the student clearly. Before beginning the interview, ask the guest to repeat the question before answering.
11. Debrief after the interview. Take some time the day after the interview to review and debrief with the students. Ask them what they learned and what they liked about the interview. What were the best questions? Did any answer surprise you? Was your question really answered? Do you have new questions on the topic?
12. Write a letter of thanks to the author/expert. This can be a thank you note or card. The letter should reflect the students' "best" writing. They should be final drafts, not sloppy copies. The letters will reflect on your school, your students, and you.
13. Cross-curricular extensions. Teachers should of course relate the literature selection to other curricular areas they wish to include such as the arts, creative or expository writing, poetry, mathematics, science, sports, social studies, etc.

ASK Journal

Page(s) _____

What the book says . . .

This reminds me of ...or I wonder...or I remember.....

My question is _____

ASK Journal

Page(s) _____

What the book says . . .

This reminds me of ...or I wonder...or I remember.....

My question is _____

Name: _____ Novel: _____

Journal Writing:

| | Always (4) | Almost Always (3) | Sometimes (2) | Seldom (1) | Never (0) |
|---|------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Followed journal entry format. (Date, pages read) | | | | | |
| Responded in his/her own voice | | | | | |
| Justified reaction to response | | | | | |
| Personal identification with characters | | | | | |
| Met journal entry length requirement (at least 7 pages) | | | | | |
| Finished novel | | | | | |

Score: _____

Questions

| | Always (4) | Almost Always (3) | Sometimes (2) | Seldom (1) | Never (0) |
|---|------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Created two questions per journal entry | | | | | |
| Used proper question format | | | | | |
| - On page | | | | | |
| - In the book | | | | | |
| - Answer to question is not in the book | | | | | |
| - Answer to question are not yes or no | | | | | |
| Justified reaction to response | | | | | |
| Personal identification with characters | | | | | |

Score: _____

Revisions

| | Always (4) | Almost Always (3) | Sometimes (2) | Seldom (1) | Never (0) |
|---|------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Cooperated with partner to analyze questions to determine revisions | | | | | |
| Revised questions are properly formatted | | | | | |
| Cooperated with partner(s) in choosing questions for the interview | | | | | |

Score: _____

Thank you Letter

| | Always (4) | Almost Always (3) | Sometimes (2) | Seldom (1) | Never (0) |
|--|------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|-----------|
| Proper friendly letter format used | | | | | |
| Proper sentence structure used | | | | | |
| Proper capitalization used throughout letter | | | | | |
| Proper punctuation and spelling used in letter | | | | | |
| Body of letter contains student's opinion | | | | | |

Score: _____

Total Score: _____

Making Your ASK Videoconference a Success

Before You Start

1. Watch the ASK video to get an overview of the project. Note especially how the teacher explains the difference between a “reaction” and a “summary.”
2. Look through the materials, lessons, and resources included and decide which ones might enhance the unit.

Students Journaling & Writing Questions

1. Encourage students to move beyond basic reading comprehension. Get them to tie what they are reading to their own lives and experiences.
2. If desired, hang the posters of the journal process in your classroom.
3. Each time students read, they should journal. If it is a chapter book, have them write down page number, their reaction, and questions based on that section. We want students to tie their reading to the interview process.
4. Write questions that draw out the author or specialist. Have them explain or describe things.

Ideally How the Conference Should Go

1. Usually the facilitators will do sound checks with all participating sites. Then there will be a welcome and the author or specialist will give a 5-10 minute introduction.
2. Students should ask their questions in pairs or threes. Group students to ask the questions. Each group should have 3-10 questions (in case another school asks their question). It will work best if during the conference the groups come up to the mic together. They should say something like this:
Student 1: “Hello my name is Jim.”
Student 2: “My name is Arnie.”
Student 1: “And our question is”
 - Both students should stay at the mic until the author finishes answering their question. Then they should say “Thank you.”
 - The facilitator will then call on the next school.
 - This procedure will allow all students “on camera” time, even if they don’t get to ask their question. In addition, it gets all students involved, and takes away some of the pressure students feel standing at the mic alone.
3. Generally the facilitator will ask for three questions from each school at a time and rotate through the schools in round-robin fashion.
4. While other schools are asking their questions, the teacher should get the next students ready. Students should be ready & standing at the mic when your turn comes. We don’t want to waste precious time with the guest waiting for students to move. So have them ready at the mic or lined up at the mic. You don’t have to move fast, but be organized.
5. In addition, everyone should *listen carefully* to make sure their question (or some variation of it) isn’t asked by another school. Don’t ask questions twice!

6. When about 5 minutes are left, the facilitator may ask for just one or two questions from each school. The author or specialist will give closing comments. At the end the students should applaud the guest.

Organization

1. Organize the questions in the order of the book or chapters. Group the “general” questions after the “book” questions.
2. Have all the questions written on 3x5 cards. You may think students will remember their question, but there’s nothing like stage fright to clear the mind! In addition, 3x5 cards are harder to rattle. The microphone will pick up rustling paper. Have students bring the card up, put it down in front of them, and ask the question. You may want to have them practice.
3. One teacher who participated in ASK had a master list of all the questions and checked them off as they were answered. She also had 3x5 cards with extra questions in case their questions were taken.

Notes on the Conference

1. Have students in place 15 minutes before the connection.
2. When your school is not asking questions, you should be muted. Your distance learning person may take care of this, or they may teach you or one of your students how to mute & unmute the mic.
3. At the beginning, the facilitator will poll the sites for audio & video checks.
4. Then the facilitator will provide the order for the questions and give opening comments.
5. If you know you are next, get your students up to the mic and ready to ask questions.
6. Have the mic in the front of the room so the author can see the students. Don’t stand too close to the mic.
7. After your set of questions is finished, then mute the microphone until it’s your turn again.

Afterwards

1. Debrief the conference with your students. Talk about what you learned. What the best questions were. What answers surprised you? How did the other classes do?
2. Practice writing a friendly letter and have students write a letter of thanks to the author.
3. Fill out the evaluation form.

ASK: Authors, Specialists, and Knowledge

Each Day

1. Read the novel!
2. Write your response in your journal—be sure your response is your reaction not a summary.

Journal

Today's Date

Journal entry is a reaction to what you read. Your entry must be at least a paragraph (7 sentences).

Think about

- How did you feel?
- What's happened in your life to help understand what you read?

Create your question

- Answer to your question cannot be "yes" or "no".
- Answer cannot be found in the book.

Set your question up

- In the book...
- In the chapter...
- On page...

Question starters that don't work:

- Did you ever...
- Do you know why...
- Have you ever...
- Do you think...
- Will you...
- Would you ever...
- Do you...
- Can you..

Question starters that work:

- Why do you think...
- Describe...
- Would you explain...
- Where did you...
- Where do you...
- How many...
- What are...
- How do you feel...
- What was your reaction...
- How would you...
- How come...

