Writing a Driving Question

Part A: Criteria for an Effective Driving Question

1. Engaging for Students

- It is understandable to and interests students of the project's intended age, demographic background, community, etc.
- It does not sound like it came from a teacher or textbook
- It actively guides student work through the project; it is not just a theme for the unit
- When applicable, it uses the words "I," "we," or "us" — not "you" or "students"
- It provokes students to ask further questions, beginning the inquiry process
- It might have a local context and/or a charge to take action, making it even more engaging — focusing on community issues and needs, or topics relevant to students' lives

2. Open-Ended

- It has several possible "right answers"
- The answer will be unique; it is not "Google-able" by students
- The answer is complex and leads to an in-depth inquiry
- It may be a "yes" or "no" question, but if so, the answer must require a detailed explanation or justification

3. Aligned with Learning Goals

- Students will need to learn important content and skills in order to create project products that answer the DQ
- It is not too big, requiring more knowledge than can be learned in a reasonable amount of time
- It does not necessarily state the learning goals explicitly; they can be specified later, when telling students more details about the project and the products to be created

Part B: Types of Driving Questions

A Philosophical or Debatable Issue, or an Intriguing Topic

- Who is a hero?
- When is war justified?
- What makes a healthy community?
- Is our water safe to drink?

- What masks do we wear as we go about our daily lives?
- Does Kashmir rightfully belong to Pakistan or India?
- What's the true cost of the things we buy?
- Which is better, the book or the movie?
- Is there "liberty and justice for all" in America today?
- Could there be life on other planets?
- What should be our policy on immigration?
- What does it mean to be a man?
- Does it matter what we eat?
- What makes a car a good deal?
- What makes mystery readers keep turning the pages?

Specifying a Product, Task, or Problem to be Solved

- How can we develop a business plan that will attract investors?
- How can we invent a new toy that is safe, not too expensive, and fun for four-year-olds?
- How can we design a theatre of a given size so it holds the maximum number of seats?
- How can we invent a new type of artificial log for a fireplace that burns with colorful flames but is environmentally friendly?
- How can we help protect an endangered species in our area?
- How can we reduce bullying?
- How can we create a guide to our community for new immigrants?

Adding a Real-World Role for Students

- How can we, as historians, create podcasts that tell the story of our city?
- How can we, as medical interns, diagnose a sick patient?
- How can we, as structural engineers, design and test bridge models for a walkway over the river?
- How can we, as composers, transform the viewer's experience of a film?
- How can we, as financial planners, advise a client about the best ways to invest and save money?
- How can we, as agricultural research scientists, design an experiment to find out which company's bean seeds grow the fastest?

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Part C: Troubleshooting Common Pitfalls When Writing a DQ

Here are some examples of driving questions and how they could be improved to better meet the criteria for an effective DQ.

First Draft →	Critique →	Revised Driving Question
1. *What adaptations do animal species make to survive in various habitats?*	Not engaging, because it sounds like a teacher or textbook.	*Could a dog live in the desert?*
2. *What are the major industries in our state?*	Not open-ended, too simple; does not require critical thinking.	*Why does our state produce the things it does?*
3. *How is math used in basketball statistics?*	Not engaging enough: too broad, not provocative.	*Is LeBron James the best basketball player ever?*
4. *Which buildings in our county should be classified as historic and protected, because they represent important pieces of our past?*	Not engaging, because it uses adult language and suggests the preferred answer.	*Does it matter if old buildings in our county are torn down?*
5. *Should natural areas be developed?*	Not as engaging as it would be if it were specific and local.	*Should our city build new housing on the land near the river?*
6. *What were the causes of the U.S. Civil War?*	Not open-ended and does not require critical thinking and debate.	*What was the most important cause of the U.S. Civil War?*
7. *How are similar themes and topics explored in stories by authors from different cultures?*	Not engaging, because it states learning goals and sounds like a teacher.	*Do people everywhere tell the same stories?*
8. *What should people consider when planning for financing college or buying a home?*	Not as engaging as it would be if it were specific and had a charge to take action.	*What financial planning advice would we give to our "client" family?*
9. *Why is genetic engineering a bad idea?*	Engaging, but slanted in one direction.	*Should we allow designer babies?*
10. *How can we use measurement skills and geometry to plan a park?*	States learning goals but doesn't have to; lacks a purpose or "why."	*How can we plan a park that people in our community will visit?*

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