

The Loom: Accountability and Thinking Questions

Accountability and Thinking Questions, found in the Student Activity Pages, form an important part of a week's work for dialectic- and rhetoric-level students. Parent-teachers, in their efforts to master the whirl of details involved in setting up and implementing *Tapestry*, can miss our explanation of the differing purposes for these questions, especially if they are new to *Tapestry*. At first glance, it seems that both Thinking and Accountability Questions are similar sets of in-depth questions about the student's reading. There are important differences between them, however. The following explanation lays out the thinking behind these two question sets, so that you, the teacher, can assign them week-by-week in a way that will best help your own unique student.

ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

Most moms are really not able to read any of their older student's work, and they need an accountability gauge. Additionally, younger students in these learning levels may not yet have developed the ability to select main ideas, construct arguments, or organize fact-filled data. The Accountability Questions (AQs) are here to help!

As we've developed *Tapestry*, we have noted feedback on AQs from around the country and have observed real live students in our own homes and co-ops. We find that some students are burdened and hampered by having to write out full answers to the Accountability Questions (because they are bright students who are readily grasping material, and such writing amounts to busy work for them), while other students are tremendously helped by the exercise of writing out answers. Generally speaking, the cost-benefit ratio seems to hinge on what the student brings to the assignment. The more the student starts out with established skills of finding main ideas, mentally retaining detailed information or facts, and doing assignments thoroughly because of a willing attitude towards learning in general, the less necessary it is for him to write out his answers to the AQs.

Students differ in their learning styles: some are auditory, some tactile, and some visual learners. Furthermore, students develop mentally at different rates and ages. Thus, they learn more easily through varying modalities and they learn more easily the more their learning skills are developed. Nevertheless, even taking into account the uniqueness of individual students, it does seem that most younger students (late dialectic/early rhetoric) benefit from the discipline of writing brief answers to the Accountability Questions for any or all of the following reasons:

- ❑ Answering AQs in written form can keep students focused on the lesson and train them to find the main ideas so that students are not at a loss when discussion time comes.
- ❑ Persuasive arguments are built on facts. If the student hasn't taken the time to master the week's facts, he cannot truly enjoy and profit from an analytical discussion. AQs can be useful to students because they provide accountability for the facts and dates that students need to remember in order to comprehend fully the more analytical elements of the lesson. Did you ever try, as a child, to do long division while your multiplication tables were still squishy? Without the proper grounding in facts, every step is laborious. *Tapestry* Accountability Questions aim at helping the student identify the main facts of each week's lesson, enabling him to cull them from his printed resources on his own, preparatory to any discussion. These then form a basis for advanced analysis with you, his mentor.
- ❑ The discipline of writing out Accountability Questions can also help students to succeed who are not initially very interested in *Tapestry* topics and methods, since diligent study makes one more proficient at and excited about mastery. Again, if one is fuzzy on details, he cannot master the precise, logical thinking that makes advanced argumentation both an art and a joy. Insufficient preparation makes for more laborious learning. AQs are designed to help moms require adequate levels of preparation through a thorough reading of each assignment.
- ❑ Some Accountability Question sections include instructions for filling in provided charts and other study aids. These, we suggest, will truly benefit all students, no matter how advanced. Learning the worth of a chart for organization, comparison, and retention of detailed information is invaluable. Chart-making cultivates attentiveness to details and the relationships between them, a study skill that will bring lifelong benefits! It is likely that once your child is hooked on charts, he'll make them automatically hereafter whenever a sea of facts confronts him. Answers for most charts are provided in the Teacher's Notes, so you can either have your student check his own work or go over it with him.

THINKING QUESTIONS

Thinking Questions (TQs) in the Student Activity Pages are written for an entirely different purpose than Accountability Questions. These are essential, “prime-the-pump” questions meant to prepare the student for his weekly discussion time. The TQs help the student prepare the pith of the worldview-oriented material for the week, and offer him a chance to “limber up” for intense mental wrestling with profound issues during upcoming discussions. Thus Thinking Questions are designed to help the student consider arguments and positions on a given question, or to gather evidence for analysis, so that he will not encounter complex topics without necessary preparation.

Unlike Accountability Questions, Thinking Questions do not focus on the student’s mastery of factual information or identification of main ideas he has found in his reading. Rather, these questions ask him to begin on his own a process of either connecting facts (dialectic) or analyzing them (rhetoric) before class. As a result, many of the Thinking Questions are not meant to be answered fully by the student. Instruct your student to do his best at answering them and anticipate that, during discussion time, his comprehension of the issues will increase.

We strongly suggest that you DO require older students to answer these questions in writing. If your student is in 7th to 9th grade and has never constructed logical arguments before, start him slowly. Thinking Questions in the first unit of each year-plan are intentionally more concrete and less complicated than those in later units. As the year progresses, Thinking Questions require students to work harder at crafting precise and persuasive arguments (and also offer you, the teacher, a framework for leading your student step by step through the process of thinking analytically). The Thinking Questions are more than a worksheet; they are designed to be a tool for teaching your child to use his blossoming treasure trove of knowledge in the Lord’s service, by developing his worldview. We hope that this Christian outlook on life will become one that he owns for himself, in large part because he has developed it wrestling with the questions raised by the classics of Western Civilization. We hope that the discussions he has with you on these materials will hone his ability to argue persuasively for that worldview.

EVERYONE’S DIFFERENT!

As with all the materials in *Tapestry of Grace*, there are any number of ways to use the Accountability and Thinking Questions. We asked veteran users for their thoughts, and here are some responses:

- ❑ “I just print the page with the Accountability and Thinking Questions on it, and give it to my student at the beginning of the week. He answers as much of it as possible by our discussion day (Thursday afternoon or Friday morning). We make sure we cover any ‘blanks’ during our discussion time.”
- ❑ “I put a check mark beside the ones I require answered in written form. For any question without a mark, my student should have the answer stored in his brain and ready for discussion time.”
- ❑ “I tell my kids the Threads on Monday and ask them quickly to read aloud all the Accountability Questions and Thinking Questions. There’s something about seeing and hearing the questions that helps them read with a focus. I don’t make them take notes from their reading unless they’re having trouble concentrating on it, for one reason or another (they’re rhetoric-level students). I do make them take notes on lectures and discussion, however, as it’s good practice for listening attentively and retaining. (Although, one of my kids is such an auditory learner that writing things out actually slows him down.)”
- ❑ “In our co-op, the rule is that the parents decide whether or not the child has to answer Accountability Questions at home, either in written or oral form, but all have to answer Thinking Questions in writing as preparation for class. If they come to class unprepared, they can’t sit at the discussion table but sit instead in what we call the ‘peanut gallery’, where they just listen to the class. They also *must* do all charts that are offered, Accountability or not.”