Closed and open questions

Questions can be broadly categorised as being either closed or open.

Closed questions test basic recall and understanding and help children to revise what they know. What happened? When did it happen?

Open questions promote deeper learning. Why did it happen?

In the study of history, open questions focus students’ attention, stimulate curiosity, and help shape their investigation. Open questions promote higher order thinking, helping children to conduct more purposeful discussion by developing their thinking skills.

Developing your students’ ability to ask deeper questions can be aided by guiding your students in the following ways:

• Ask your students to test and refine their ideas in group discussions.
• Model questions that show students how to make predictions from, and raise doubts about evidence.
• Encourage students to think about their thinking, and how and where they have derived their ideas from,
• Model the attitude of respect towards the person asking a question.

More resources on questioning skills

Here are some links to websites focusing of critical thinking and inquiry pedagogy:

• Visible thinking is a website based on Harvard University’s research into developing critical thinking skills.
• Project-based learning will provide you with further links to other inspirational teachers using inquiry learning practices.
• This is an Intel sponsored webinar titled Thinking critically with primary sources. It gives some examples of how students can use ICT to examine primary sources.