MODULE 8 · PRINTABLE THINKING ROUTINE

The 5 Why's

A visible thinking routine for curiosity, dialogue and deeper inquiry



ABOUT THIS FIGURE

The 5 Why's figure is J. Da Silva's (2018) interpretation of Kath Murdoch's (2012) 5 Why's, which itself grew from "The 3 Whys" thinking routine developed at Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

MODULE 8 · THE ROUTINE, STEP BY STEP

The 5 Why's in practice

Five gentle questions to delve into the underlying causes of a situation or belief

Sit beside a child and move gently through the five questions below. Begin with curiosity, probe the response, challenge assumptions kindly, show genuine interest, then agree or disagree with respect and ask one last reflective question. Allow misconceptions at the start: rather than correcting a first answer, follow it with another gentle "why", and let dialogue lead the child to discover the facts for themselves.

1 WHY

Ask with curiosity

Open the inquiry with genuine curiosity, and make a comfortable space for the child to explore their first response.

TRY *"Why do you think this happened?"*

2 WHY

Probe the response, go deeper

Take the child's first answer and gently probe the reasoning that sits beneath it.

TRY *"You mentioned [their response]. Why do you think that is the case?"*

3 WHY

Gently challenge assumptions

Invite the child to think beyond the surface and to notice factors that are not immediately obvious.

TRY *"Why do you think two people might see the same event so differently?"*

4 WHY

Express interest and ask further

Show you are engaged, and help the child connect their thinking to broader concepts or principles.

TRY *"That's interesting. Why do you think [an aspect of their response] is important?"*

5 WHY

Agree or disagree respectfully, and ask the final question

Whether you agree or disagree, do so with respect, and use it to draw out the significance of the child's reasoning.

TRY *"I see your point about [their response]. Why do you think this matters in the bigger picture?"*

KEEP GOING

Turn to the teacher companion on the next page for open-ended questions to keep in your pocket, reflection prompts, and space to note how a 5 Why's conversation went.

MODULE 8 · TEACHER COMPANION

Putting the 5 Why's *into practice*

Use this companion sheet alongside the figure. Keep the open-ended questions in your pocket as you talk with children, then use the reflection prompts afterwards to review how the conversation went and where it could go next.

ALLOW FOR MISCONCEPTIONS

Rather than correcting a child's first answer, follow it with another gentle "why", and let experimentation and dialogue lead them to discover the facts for themselves. This iterative questioning deepens children's thinking and lets you see their thought process, so you can model how to build on a first reaction to reach a more substantial conclusion.

Open-ended questions to keep in your pocket

- Oh really, tell me more.
- Why do you think that?
- How does that make you feel?
- How do you know that?
- What does this remind you of?
- What connections can you make to this?

Teacher reflection

- Where did the child's thinking surprise me?
- Which "why" opened the deepest reflection?
- Did I listen more than I spoke?
- What assumption did the child begin to question?
- How did the conversation end, and where could it go next?

NOTES FROM A 5 WHY'S CONVERSATION

ONE "WHY" I WANT TO TRY NEXT TIME