

Virtual Canada Meets IB

In order to prepare students for the rigors of studying history at the post-secondary level, Virtual Canada has incorporated some of the techniques used by the *International Baccalaureate* program. Specifically, in the Theory of Knowledge course (of the IB diploma program) students are required to identify and create knowledge questions (KQ). In so doing, they are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of what is studied while also developing an appreciation for the importance of actually thinking about the things they think about.

Knowledge questions are general, open-ended questions about knowledge *itself*; they are not specific questions like “In what year did Columbus discover the New World?” Specific questions only have one answer whereas a genuine knowledge question has no “right” answer. In fact, a good quality knowledge question might have multiple answers which are equally plausible; and that’s the point—to give students the opportunity to deal constructively with the inherent uncertainty and ambiguity of human knowledge.

The development of knowledge questions was specifically designed to complement the tutorial component of this course, i.e. students read one or two tutorials in a given unit and then based on the situations they encounter in those readings develop an acceptable knowledge question. These knowledge questions are then used as a basis of either small group or whole class discussion. There are a total of eight available tutorials (two per section). This means students could form as many as eight KQs (or four if students are given the option of reading only one tutorial per unit).

Use the following procedure to introduce the concept of knowledge questions to the class:

- 1). Show the class the **Knowledge Questions Primer PowerPoint**. This will explain what knowledge is (and what it is not); it will also present students with a number of examples of how to form an acceptable KQ using the “ladder of abstraction” technique recommended by the IB program.
- 2). Following the end of the PowerPoint mentioned above, students can gather in to small groups and complete the **Knowledge Questions Small Group Activity**. There is no answer key for this activity; however, an exemplar has been included (see **Sereste KQ Key**) that could be used for the purposes of clarification.

Note: both of these handouts are available for download in the Student Zone of the website.

These two downloads are intended to be used as an introduction to the creation of knowledge questions and classroom discussion. Teachers are encouraged to get students to use the ladder of abstraction to create KQs for the course’s tutorials using loose leaf, i.e. no special handout has been created for this purpose.

If you have any questions about implementing this assignment please contact the site’s author at rickinoutlook@hotmail.com.