Constructing Identities

How do we form and shape our identities?

How do we define who we are?

What can you learn about yourself by studying the lives of others?

How does what others think about you affect how you think about yourself?

What turning points determine our individual pathways to adulthood?

In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?

Conflict & Change

How does conflict lead to change?

What problem-solving strategies can individuals use to manage conflict and change?

How does an individual’s point of view affect the way they deal with conflict?

What personal qualities have helped you to deal with conflict and change?

How might it feel to live through a conflict that disrupts your way of life?

How does conflict influence an individual’s decisions and actions?

How are people transformed through their relationships with others?

What is community and what are the individual’s responsibility to the community as well as the community’s responsibility to the individual?

Social Justice

Adapted from Tools for Reading, Writing, and Thinking Greece Central School District
http://web000.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Tools/Index.htm
What is social justice?

To what extent does power or the lack of power affect individuals?

What is oppression and what are the root causes?

How are prejudice and bias created? How do we overcome them?

What are the responsibilities of the individual in regard to issues of social justice?

Can literature serve as a vehicle for social change?

When should an individual take a stand against what he/she believes to be an injustice? What are the most effective ways to do this?

What are the factors that create an imbalance of power within a culture?

What does power have to do with fairness and justice?

Is it ever necessary to question the status quo?

What are the benefits and consequences of questioning / challenging social order?

Do we have choices concerning fairness and justice?

Does labeling and stereotyping influence how we look at and understand the world?

What does it mean to be invisible? (context: minorities)

In what ways can a minority keep their issues on the larger culture’s "radar screen?"

Does an institution/culture ever have a right to censor its artists?

What creates prejudice and what can an individual overcome it?

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What are the causes and consequences of prejudice and injustice, and how does an individual’s response to them reveal his/her true character?

What allows some individuals to take a stand against prejudice/oppression while others choose to participate in it?

What are the causes and consequences of prejudice and how does an individual’s response to it reveal his/her morals, ethics, and values?

**Culture: Values, Beliefs & Rituals**

How do individuals develop values and beliefs?

What factors shape our values and beliefs?

How do values and beliefs change over time?

How does family play a role in shaping our values and beliefs?

Why do we need beliefs and values?

What happens when belief systems of societies and individuals come into conflict?

When should an individual take a stand in opposition to an individual or larger group?

When is it appropriate to challenge the beliefs or values of society?

Are there universal characteristics of belief systems that are common across people and time?

To what extent do belief systems shape and/or reflect culture and society?

How are belief systems represented and reproduced through history,

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literature, art, and music?

How do beliefs, ethics, or values influence different people's behavior?

How do individuals reconcile competing belief systems within a given society (e.g., moral beliefs conflicting with legal codes)?

When a person's individual choices are in direct conflict with his/her society, what are the consequences?

What is morality and what are the factors that have an impact on the development of our morality?

What role or purpose does religion/spirituality serve in a culture?

What purpose or function do ethics/philosophy have in governing technological advances?

How do our values and beliefs shape who we are as individuals and influence our behavior?

Heroes & Sheroes

Do the attributes of a hero remain the same over time?

When does a positive personality trait become a tragic flaw?

What is the role of a hero or "sheroe" (coined by Maya Angelou) in a culture?

How do various cultures reward/recognize their heroes and sheroes?

Why is it important for people and cultures to construct narratives about their experience?

What is the relevance of studying multicultural texts?

Adapted from Tools for Reading, Writing, and Thinking Greece Central School District http://web000.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Tools/Index.htm
How does the media shape our view of the world and ourselves?

In a culture where we are bombarded with other people trying to define us, how do we make decisions for ourselves?

**The Human Condition**

In the face of adversity, what causes some people to prevail while others fail?

What is the meaning of life?

What is the meaning of life and does that shape our beliefs regarding death?

Are we governed/guided by fate, free will, a greater power, or do we fall somewhere on the spectrum between?

**Language & Literature**

**Language**

How is our understanding of culture and society constructed through and by language?

How can language be powerful?

How can you use language to empower yourself?

How is language used to manipulate us?

In what ways are language and power inseparable?

Is it possible to have culture without language?

Is it possible to think without language?

How does language influence the way we think, act, and perceive the world?
How do authors use the resources of language to impact an audience?

**Literature**

How is literature like life?

What is literature supposed to do?

What influences a writer to create?

What is the purpose and function of art in our culture?

How does literature reveal the values of a given culture or time period?

How does the study of fiction and nonfiction texts help individuals construct their understanding of reality?

In what ways are all narratives influenced by bias and perspective?

Where does the meaning of a text reside? Within the text, within the reader, or in the transaction that occurs between them?

Can a reader infer an author's intentions based on the text?

What are enduring questions and conflicts that writers (and their cultures) grappled with hundreds of years ago and are still relevant today?

How do we gauge the optimism or pessimism of a particular time period or particular group of writers?

Are there universal themes in literature that are of interest or concern to all cultures and societies?

What are the characteristics or elements that cause a piece of literature to endure?

What distinguishes a good read from great literature?

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Who decides the criteria for judging whether or not a book is any good?

What is the purpose of: science fiction? satire? historical novels, etc.?

**Love & Sacrifice**

What is love?

Does love require sacrifice?

What is the relationship between love and trust or between love and loyalty?

What are the boundaries of love and sacrifice, and where does one draw the line between them?

What are the factors that move individuals, communities, or nations to great sacrifice and what are the consequences?

**Our View of Ourselves & The World**

How do we know what we know?

How does what we know about the world shape the way we view ourselves?

How do our personal experiences shape our view of others?

What does it mean to be an insider or an outsider?

What does it mean to "grow up"?

Do you believe that things are fated no matter what, or do you believe your actions can change the course of your life?

Have the forces of good and evil changed over time?

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Relationships & Community
What are the elements that build a strong friendship?
How do friendships change over time?
What impact does family have during different stages of our lives?
What can we learn from different generations?
How is conflict an inevitable part of relationships?
How do you know if a relationship is healthy or hurtful?
What personal qualities help or hinder the formation of relationships?
How are people transformed through their relationships with others?
What is community and what are the individual’s responsibilities to the community as well as the community’s responsibilities to the individual?