

Fulbright-Hays Group Projects Abroad
Summer Institute on China 2018

IB Theory of Knowledge
Skills Focus: Asking Good Knowledge Questions
Preston Hatfield

Grade Level: 11 – 12 English Language Arts

Essential Question: How can we shift our thinking from Area of Knowledge content in order to construct quality Knowledge Claims and Knowledge Questions?

Introduction: ToK is an interdisciplinary course that examines the nature of knowledge and seeks to investigate the question “How do we know what we know?” As such, it is not concerned with facts about any one text or discipline, but rather with how knowledge is constructed and evaluated across texts and disciplines.

In this lesson students will practice the “Think ToK” method by examining and discussing the jataka of Mahasattva in Mogao Grotto Cave #254, and working to develop quality knowledge claims and questions, according to ToK’s framework and definitions.

This is a *skills* rather than a *content* lesson. By the time students do this lesson they should have already learned and had isolated practice using various ToK vocabulary and concepts, identifying relevant KCs based on observations of an RLS, and converting KCs into quality KQs. It is NOT for beginners to the class. This lesson will have students putting all the pieces together (although not for the first time) to complete the ToK process, starting with a new RLS and ending with unique KQs. Students will be assessed on how well their KQs meet the three criteria (see rubric).

Objective: SWBAT ask and develop good Knowledge Questions (KQs) through the collaborative study of RLS texts from the Silk Road using various Area of Knowledge (AoK) lenses.

SWBAT improve their IB profile qualities of being Inquirers and Open Minded about Chinese cultures and religions.

SWBAT explain, in brief, the basic principles of Buddhism (compassion and valuing of all life, and the idea of reincarnation until enlightenment).

CCSS Standard: ELA 11-12 S&L.1: Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

1.C: Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.

Materials: Powerpoint and projector, class set of Graphic Organizer handout (see attachment) either printed or distributed digitally on Google Classroom, a class set of the ToK Reference Guide, the image and written text of the Mahasattva jataka. Teacher will need to be familiar not

only with ToK as a class, but also with Buddhism in ancient China and what the Mogao Caves were and why they are significant.

Equipment: Computer and projector, printed copies of handouts or a class set of computers with internet access for students to use.

Teacher Preparation:

Teacher should familiarize themselves with the [Mogao Caves](#), [Dunhuang](#), and [Buddhism](#)

Teacher should prepare their slides which should include, among other things, the image and text of the Mahasattva jataka, the various instructional steps for students to follow, and whatever notes they want students to have about the text by the end of the lesson.

Teacher should print the necessary handouts for their students, or schedule the digital distribution of the handouts through Google Classroom.

Procedure:

- I. Prearrange to have students in groups of 3-4 according to their self-selected AoK (survey them in advance of this lesson)
- II. Students get into content groups. Give them ToK reference document (see attachment).
 - A. Review the differences between content and knowledge focus.
 - B. Clarify Ways of Knowing
- III. Project Mahasattva jataka image and story text.
 - . Task 1: What elements about the text (as an artifact) is your content area interested in, and why (historian vs artist vs religious leader, etc)?
 - A. Task 2: What content-based assertions to truth can you make about the text? How do you know your assertions are true (what WoK are you using?)
 - B. Task 3: Based on answers for Task 2, craft at least 1 KC.
- IV. Get into mixed groups
 - . Count of A-C in home groups, move into mixed-discipline groups
 - A. Share out ideas from Tasks 1-3, note and discuss most significant similarities and differences.
 - B. Task 4: Use group KCs and collaboration to generate at least 1 KQ.
- V. Explicit instruction on the history of Buddhism in China
 - . Students take targeted notes (5-10 minutes) on the history of Buddhism's travel from India through China along the Silk Road, especially in the Mogao Caves.
 - A. Class discussion & wrap up

Assessment: Students will be assessed on the quality of their Knowledge Question according to a three-criteria checklist rubric (see attachment). Note that IB is graded on a 7 point scale where a 7 is an A, a 6 is an A-, a 5 is a B, a 4 is a C and a 3 is a D.

Author's Note: An actual ToK class would not use this document as they would have their own materials from the class itself. I designed this reference document for my colleagues who are unfamiliar with the class.

A Grossly Abbreviated Introduction to IB Theory of Knowledge (ToK)

ToK is an interdisciplinary course that examines the nature of knowledge and seeks to investigate the question “How do we know what we know?” As such, it is not concerned with facts about any one text or discipline, but rather with how knowledge is constructed and evaluated across disciplines.

Real Life Situation (RLS): This refers to any text (visual, written, audio, etc) from which knowledge can be acquired. It can include hypothetical stories and situations, science experiments, living organisms, or anything else that one might encounter in the world.

Ways of Knowing (WoK)	Areas of Knowledge (AoK)
Emotion Memory Imagination Sense perception Intuition Reason Faith Language	Ethics Religious knowledge Indigenous knowledge History Math Human sciences Natural science The arts

Assertions to truth: Content-based versus Knowledge-based

“The law of gravity is an established scientific principle”-is an assertion to truth that is grounded in, and specifically about natural science. ToK does not care about this kind of assertion; however, students will make content-based assertions to truth as a brainstorm of their RLS. It is important to note that a content-based assertion to truth does not necessarily need to come from the RLS itself. It can also be a related idea the student has while considering the RLS.

In contrast, “All claims should have scientific evidence for them to be considered valid” is a claim about the nature of knowledge. The claim lends itself to examining the nature of evidence’s role in producing valid knowledge in science. In ToK this called a Knowledge Claim (KC).

Knowledge Questions (KQs): Questions about the nature of knowledge and how it is constructed in and across different AoKs, based on a specific RLS.

KQs are constructed through the combination of *some of* the following elements:

1. **Central ToK concepts like justification, validity, bias, and reliability.**
2. Associated ToK concepts like belief, evidence, faith, values, & culture.
3. References to relevant AoKs and/or WoKs.

Example:

What role do intuition and reason play in the **justification** of ethical values or moral codes?

To what extent can we speak of **certainty** when it comes to claims made in history?

Does the subjective nature of evidence in the arts make it any less **valid**?

Skills Practice: Asking Good Knowledge Questions

ToK Method Exemplar (From the lens of a social scientist)

RLS	ASSERTION TO TRUTH	KC	WoK
MLK's "I have a Dream" Speech	People are predisposed to categorize others and embrace group identity, with discrimination being the natural outcome.	Evidence must originate from a relevant authority in order to be considered reliable.	Reason; Intuition; Sense perception
KQ	Does the <u>evidence</u> of the human sciences offer concrete and reliable knowledge?		

Your Assigned AoK Lens: _____

Pre-task Discussion Question

1. What about this RLS is salient to your AoK (What details seem important, and what kinds of questions might your discipline ask about it)?

Task: Complete the organizer from left to right, with the KQ being the last step.

RLS	ASSERTION TO TRUTH	KC	WOK
Mahasattva jataka			
KQ			

ToK Knowledge Question Rubric

Student Name: _____

Your KQ will be evaluated based on the checklist below. **Y** indicates that the criteria has been met completely and masterfully, **✓** indicates that the criteria has been mostly and proficiently met, and **N** indicates that the criteria has not been met, or is well below standard.

- Exceeding Standard*** (7) All criteria are fully satisfied
- Meeting Standard*** (5) Two criteria are fully satisfied
- Approaching Standard*** (3) One criteria is fully satisfied

** 3 ✓s equal a rubric score of 4

Knowledge Question	SCORE:
KQ focuses on the nature of knowledge rather than discipline-specific content	/7
KQ is open ended	
KQ correctly uses at least two of the three prescribed elements (vocabulary types)	

ToK Knowledge Question Rubric

Student Name: _____

Your KQ will be evaluated based on the checklist below. **Y** indicates that the criteria has been met completely and masterfully, **✓** indicates that the criteria has been mostly and proficiently met, and **N** indicates that the criteria has not been met, or is well below standard.

- Exceeding Standard*** (7) All criteria are fully satisfied
- Meeting Standard*** (5) Two criteria are fully satisfied
- Approaching Standard*** (3) One criteria is fully satisfied

** 3 ✓s equal a rubric score of 4

Knowledge Question	SCORE:
KQ focuses on the nature of knowledge rather than discipline-specific content	/7
KQ is open ended	
KQ correctly uses at least two of the three prescribed elements (vocabulary types)	