

Curiosity Walk – Asking Questions About Our Environment



Curriculum Links

Scotland

I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by responding to and asking different kinds of questions.
LIT-07

UK

□ ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge

Key Concept

I can observe my surroundings and ask thoughtful questions to explore the world around me.



Background

Curiosity is the foundation of scientific thinking and problem-solving. By asking questions, learners begin to investigate the world around them, making sense of what they see, hear, and feel. This lesson encourages learners to observe their environment closely and generate their own questions about nature, people, and places. It helps build inquiry skills, critical thinking, and a sense of wonder about the world.

Resources

- Clipboards and pencils (optional, for recording questions)
- "I Wonder" question starters (printed or displayed for inspiration)
- Magnifying glasses or binoculars (optional, to encourage close observation) (optional)

Wider Skills

- Observation: Learners develop awareness of small details and patterns in nature.
- Critical thinking: They learn to question what they see rather than just accepting it.
- Scientific inquiry: Encourages exploration through asking rather than answering.
- Environmental awareness: Helps learners appreciate and connect with the natural world.

Metaskills

- Communicating – Giving & Receiving Information: Learners share observations and articulate questions.
- Sense-making: They connect their observations with prior knowledge.
- Curiosity & Exploration: Encourages learners to develop open-ended thinking.
- Self-management: Encourages patience and careful observation before reacting.

Lesson

Introduction (10 minutes) – Encouraging Curiosity

- Gather learners in a circle outside and ask:
 - What sounds, sights, and smells do you notice right now?
 - What do you think you would notice if you slowed down and looked more closely?
- Explain that today's challenge is not about finding answers, but about asking questions.
- Introduce question starters like:
 - "I wonder why..."
 - "What would happen if..."
 - "How does this work?"

Main Activity (30–40 minutes) – Curiosity Walk

Part 1: Silent Walk (10 minutes)

- Learners walk around the playground or outdoor space in silence for a few minutes, focusing on observation.
- They are encouraged to look closely at details they may not usually notice (e.g., cracks in the pavement, patterns on leaves, the way shadows fall).

Part 2: Generating Questions (10–15 minutes)

- Learners stop at three different points and write down one question per stop about something they notice.
- Examples of good questions:
 - Why do some trees lose their leaves but others don't?
 - How does a puddle disappear after it rains?
 - Why do ants follow each other in a line?

Part 3: Sharing and Expanding Questions (10 minutes)

- Learners return to the group and share one question they found interesting.
- The class discusses:
 - Which questions make us most curious?
 - Can we turn any questions into an experiment?

Plenary (10 minutes) – Reflecting on the Power of Questions

- Ask learners:
 - What was the most surprising thing you noticed?
 - How does asking questions change the way we see the world?
 - What could we do to try and answer some of these questions?
- Encourage them to continue being curious in everyday life.

Key discussion questions:

- What makes a good question?
- Why do we sometimes stop asking questions as we get older?
- How can curiosity help us in school and in life?

Assessment

Observation skills:

Learners should demonstrate awareness by noticing and describing small details in their environment. Success can be seen in learners pausing to look closely at objects, identifying features they may not have previously noticed, and showing engagement in the walk.

Question quality:

Learners should generate open-ended, thought-provoking questions rather than simple yes/no questions. A strong question will show curiosity and encourage deeper exploration, such as “Why do some trees lose their leaves while others don’t?” rather than “Is this a tree?”.

Participation in discussion:

Learners should actively engage in group discussions, sharing their observations and questions. They should also build on each other’s ideas by expanding on a peer’s question or offering a different perspective. Evidence of success includes a variety of contributions and learners demonstrating curiosity about each other’s ideas.

Reflective thinking:

Learners should be able to explain why their question interests them and how it could lead to further learning. A well-developed response might include linking their question to a previous experience or suggesting a way to explore the question further, such as designing an experiment or making a prediction.

Follow-up task (optional):

As an extension, learners could select their most interesting question and research possible answers, present findings to the group, or visually represent their curiosity through a drawing, diagram, or comic strip illustrating their thought process.

Informal assessment methods:

- Listening for depth of thought in discussions.
- Observing if learners engage deeply with their surroundings rather than rushing through the walk.
- Asking learners to share their favourite question and explain why it intrigues them.

Notes

- Pairing younger learners with older ones can help build confidence and teach teamwork.
- Consider creating a display of the characters in the classroom or outdoors to celebrate their work.
- Encourage learners to name their characters and write a short story or description to accompany their creation.
- This activity pairs well with a literacy lesson focused on fairytales, inspiring learners to write or act out stories featuring their characters.

Younger Classes

- Simplify the questioning process – Instead of expecting them to form complex questions, guide them with “What do you see? What do you hear? What do you wonder?” and allow them to respond with simple observations.
- Use sensory prompts – Encourage questions based on touch, smell, and sound rather than abstract reasoning. For example, ask “What does this bark feel like? Why do you think it is rough?” rather than “Why do trees have bark?”.
- Pair questioning with actions – Have children point, mimic, or act out their observations rather than only verbalising them.
- Use visual aids – Show images of different objects (e.g., a bird, a worm, a tree) and ask “What do you wonder about this?” to scaffold their thinking.
- Reduce the number of stops – Instead of three points on the curiosity walk, focus on just one or two key locations where children can explore freely and share their thoughts.
- Group discussions instead of individual recording – Encourage whole-group conversations to allow children to hear and build on each other’s ideas rather than relying on independent questioning.

Older Classes

- Encourage deeper questioning – Challenge learners to ask “why” and “how” rather than just “what” questions. If they ask “Why is that leaf changing colour?” prompt them to think further: “What do you think is happening inside the leaf?”.
- Introduce structured inquiry – Guide learners to frame questions using Bloom’s Taxonomy (e.g., factual, analytical, evaluative questions). For example:
 - Factual: What colour is the sky?
 - Analytical: Why does the sky change colour at different times of day?
 - Evaluative: What would happen if the sky was always red?
- Encourage independent research – Have learners choose one of their questions to investigate further, either through library research, observation, or experiments.
- Pair questioning with hypothesis-making – Encourage learners to predict possible answers to their questions before researching them. For example, “Why does moss grow on one side of the tree?” could be followed by “I think it’s because that side gets less sunlight”.
- Challenge them to find connections – Ask learners to relate their questions to bigger scientific, geographical, or ethical concepts. For example, if they wonder “Why do birds fly south in winter?”, they can link this to climate, food availability, and migration patterns.
- Debate and discuss unanswerable questions – Encourage learners to consider philosophical or abstract ideas, such as “What if plants could talk?” or “What if humans had night vision?”, fostering creativity and deeper thinking.