

Thinking About Questions

Some questions demand a simple, straightforward response and can have only **one** correct answer. **Factual, literal-level questions** fall into this category. What shape is a stop sign? What is the boiling point of water? Who brings the news of Polyneices' burial to Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone*? Where did Douglass give his *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* speech? Generally, these questions ask the reader to recall something the author has stated explicitly. They can be answered by pointing to something in the text or by drawing an obvious inference.

More complicated questions may yield **more than one** reasonable response. They can be supported with evidence from the text or from common experience. **Interpretive questions** ask the reader to analyze a story or an essay against what the reader knows of human behavior or world experience. Why does Antigone's sister, Ismene, who initially refused to accompany Antigone to bury their brother, offer herself to King Creon as being as guilty as her sister? How does Douglass "raise the consciousness" of his Rochester audience in the *Fourth of July* speech? Why does the sickly plant thrive when placed on the black smudge in Babbitt's *The Imp in the Basket*? All of these questions can reasonably support different answers depending on how readers use evidence from the text for their answers.

Note that personal opinion is different from reasoned judgment. Not every opinion is of equal value. Without clear support from the text, without valid inferences, without explanation of context, and without close reading, an unsubstantiated opinion has little value.

Evaluative questions provide an opportunity to move beyond a specific text. Evaluative questions can provide an opportunity for comparisons among or between texts. An individual's knowledge, experience, and values form the basis for judging the relative quality of an author's work or for exploring critical issues and major themes in a broader context. Why are people like Antigone motivated to risk their lives for others? Can religious allusions like those employed by Douglass be as effective in today's culturally diverse America? Evaluative questions demand that the reader connect the text to the world.