



PRACTICING SHALLOW VS. DEEP CURIOSITY

"Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning."

— Don Miguel Ruiz

OVERVIEW

Students learn about the differences between shallow and deep curiosity and develop questions that reflect both levels of curiosity. Students will engage in a conversational pair activity where they will practice connecting with each other as they use these two types of questions.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To cultivate strong relationships between students
- To foster a non-judgemental classroom climate
- To practice listening and questioning as conversational skills
- As a community building or get-to-know you activity

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- Writing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students OR Teachers OR School Staff will:

- Understand that curiosity can be a tool for connecting with others
- Learn about the differences between shallow and deep curiosity
- Learn how to develop questions that reflect both levels of curiosity
- Learn when to ask different types of questions

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Curiosity
- Courage
- Empathy

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Focused Attention

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Try the practice on yourself.. Then, reflect on the following:
 - What kinds of questions do you typically ask your colleagues?
 - What do you wish you could learn about them?
 - What kinds of questions do you wish your colleagues would ask you?
 - When do you know your question is too "shallow" or "deep"?
- Brainstorm several shallow and deep questions that are age-appropriate for your students. Keep a list of questions handy in case some students need support in coming up with questions independently.

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

Humans are naturally curious beings, and our curiosity helps us understand the fascinating world around us. Yet, we often look at someone and make assumptions about them without actually asking any questions. At the same time, we feel hurt and misunderstood when someone else does the same to us. How can we avoid this unpleasant experience? By rekindling our innate curiosity, we can create connections with those around us.

To practice curiosity, let us first break it down into two types: shallow and deep.

Shallow Curiosity:

Shallow curiosity is the standard version of curiosity as we know it: asking questions to gain information. Examples include: asking someone their name, where they live, what they like to eat for dinner, and what their favorite movie is. Shallow curiosity helps us build an initial connection with new people, as if opening a small window into their life. We start to get to know them with our shallow curiosity, which feels like cautiously stepping into unknown waters.

Deep Curiosity:

Once we are comfortable with someone (and they appear comfortable with us), we can ask them deeper questions: what the story behind their name is, what they like best about where they live, what a dinner conversation looks like in their family, and which character they most identify with in their favorite movie and why. Deep curiosity can open a door to the heart and help us make a stronger connection with others. It feels like swimming in deep waters, witnessing the mesmerizing hidden sea world.

Shallow curiosity	Deep curiosity
What is your name?	What is the story behind your name?
Where do you live?	What do you like best about where you live?
What do you like to eat for dinner?	What does a dinner conversation look like in your family?
What is your favorite movie?	Which character in the movie do you most identify with and why?

Let's practice shallow and deep curiosity with a simple exercise:

1. Think of three questions that reflect shallow curiosity. Write them down.
2. Now think of three deep questions that parallel and build on your shallow questions. Write them down. See the table above for examples.
3. Pick someone you have not interacted with much. If you are not feeling adventurous, choose someone you feel more comfortable asking questions to.
4. Ask this person any of your shallow questions first. Listen to their response and gauge if you want to ask another shallow question and repeat. Allow the other person to ask you questions too. Take turns.
5. If you feel you have built an initial rapport (e.g., "Does this conversation feel comfortable for you? May I ask you a deeper question?"), try asking one of your deeper questions. Listen patiently and intently, and gauge the comfort level of the other person before asking a follow-up or a new question (e.g., "May I ask you a follow-up question?").
6. Your partner may not feel comfortable with some of your questions and could say something like, "I would prefer not to answer this question right now. Do you have another one you would like to ask me?" Respect their preference, take a pause, and change your question.
7. Now let the other person ask you questions. Answer candidly. But if you feel uncomfortable, gently request them to change the question.
8. Take turns. You may move back and forth between shallow and deep questions depending on the flow of the conversation.

After the conversation, reflect on the following questions.

Answer the following questions in your pairs:

- How did you feel about the conversation? At the beginning? At the end? Apprehensive? Cautious? Comfortable? Was it amusing? Meaningful? Stressful? Invasive?
- What did you learn about the other person? Did you learn anything new?
- What stood out for you from the conversation? Why?
- Did you gain a new insight about the other person? How might that help you?

Reflect on one or more of the following questions as a whole group:

- Did you find this exercise helpful? In what ways?
- How did you feel during the shallow curiosity moments? During the deep curiosity moments? Did those two moments feel different to you?
- How did you feel about your connection with the other person after the conversation compared to how you felt before? Did anything change within you?
- What did you think about your questions? Should you change them in any way for next time? How can you make your deep questions deeper? When would it be more appropriate to ask them?
- How do you know that you have built enough trust with someone else to ask them deeper questions about themselves?

CLOSURE/EXTENSIONS

Ask your students:

How might you use shallow and deep curiosity in the future? Where? In what situations?

Next steps: Try doing this practice in a real-life situation, for example, when you see someone sad or happy on the playground, in the classroom, or in the dining hall. Try to make a gentle connection with them using your curiosity.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do students demonstrate a knowledge of the differences between shallow and deep curiosity? How do their questions reflect this?
- Do students understand how to navigate between these two types of questions? How do they know when they have built enough rapport to go deeper? How can I (teacher) help them to better gauge the appropriateness of their questions?
- Are there ways I (teacher) can integrate shallow vs. deep curiosity into my future lessons or during class meetings or other contexts at school?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Curiosity is the driver of learning. It is closely linked to students' [academic performance](#). Specifically, curiosity is one of the strongest predictors of academic success in both math and reading for both [children](#) and [teenagers](#). As teachers and learners, our language (including the questions we ask) can significantly influence our [curiosity and attitudes about learning](#). Questions can be powerful tools to foster a sense of [joyful exploration](#) in a classroom. Studies also show that students' curiosity is linked to their [life satisfaction, positive emotions, hope, purpose in life](#), as well as [self-compassion](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Curiosity serves as a motivational drive in almost all human activities, ranging from gathering information to solving the mysteries of the world around us. Students acquire new knowledge about language, relationships, and surroundings through their curiosity. Science thrives on curiosity. More importantly, curiosity plays a crucial role in fostering [well-being and finding meaning in life](#), especially in highly uncertain and challenging times such as the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and [among young adults](#).

Curiosity [promotes](#) engagement, responsiveness, and flexibility to other's diverse perspectives, thereby helping in building social bonds and positive relationships in school and beyond. Leading with deep curiosity allows us to challenge our assumptions and biases, which is especially important in the times of social isolation and loneliness. As a counter to rising societal polarization and social divides, curiosity can help us build bridges with those who we do not necessarily agree with.

SOURCE

This practice was adapted based on key terms introduced in *Seek: How Curiosity Can Transform Your Life And Change The World* by Scott Shigeoka