

9. Why ask questions? What makes a good question?

INTRODUCTION

Explain to the children that today they will be asking questions and answering them and thinking about different types of question! Firstly, check that they have a list of question words to hand. Most question words start with *wh-* where, what, who etc. Another common question word is *how*. But there are other ways to ask questions. Quick warm up – start by playing the yes/no game. Someone asks questions which can only be answered by yes or no. For example you could ask: Are you happy? But you couldn't ask: How do you feel? Can they see the difference between 'closed questions' – generating a limited answer – and 'open questions' – ones that allow people to be expansive in their answers?

ACTIVITY

Continue with the theme of different types of question and ask the children if they know any famous nursery rhymes like Humpty Dumpty or Jack and Jill. Hopefully everyone will know one! Encourage them to think about one particular rhyme and ask:

- **What questions can we ask that are easy to answer?** [Encourage them to contribute a range of easy-to-answer questions, for example, 'Where is Humpty Dumpty sitting? What happened to him? Who tried to save him? Point out that these are all closed questions and they don't reveal anything new.]
- **What types of question could we ask to find out more?** [Encourage them to contribute a range of more challenging questions, for example, if we ask what was Humpty Dumpty doing on the wall in the first place, we have to be imaginative in our answer!]

Ask the children then to stand in a big circle and encourage one child to ask questions that the others do NOT know the answer to, such as: '**Where was the wall that Humpty Dumpty was sitting on?**' Ask other children step into the circle if they have an answer. This can be done with children taking turns or just randomly as children have ideas – a bit like a drama improvisation exercise. It might be a good idea to change to a new nursery rhyme after a while to help more children have a go at playing.

Explain that as well as being fun and creative, asking different questions can help us to find out more or at least think about things in a new way.

ACTIVITY

Point out that asking questions can lead to new discoveries. For example, we wouldn't have bothered going to the Moon if someone had not wondered what it was like there! Ask the children what questions had to be asked and what problems solved before human beings could walk on the Moon. Here are some starter questions:

- How can we get there?
- How can we get back?
- How can we breathe there?
- How long will it take to get there?
- What will we need on the journey?
- How much will it cost?

Point out that these questions each lead on to another set of questions. So a question like, '**What will we need on the journey?**' leads to more questions such as 'What will we eat?' ... 'How will we stop food going bad?' ... 'How will we cook food?' ... 'What will we do with any leftovers?' ...

Point out that only after ALL the questions had been answered, could people go to the Moon! Then ask children to work with a partner and:

- think about an invention they would like to create or an expedition they would like to go on.
- generate a set of questions for their expedition or invention. [For example, if they want to go into the centre of a volcano, they need to ask questions such as: What will we wear? How will we be transported into the centre? How can we collect lava to bring back? And so on.]
- create a poster or labelled picture showing their questions and solutions: which may well be 'creative'!
- imagine that your idea might actually come true in the future if people keep asking the right questions: say what the consequences might be for the people and for the world. Might the world be a better place in some way?

CONCLUSIONS

Remind them that asking good questions can lead to new discoveries of all kinds. Ask them to reflect on which sorts of questions are most likely to stop people looking for new ideas and which are most likely to open new possibilities.