

## **Elementary Grades Lesson (Grades 3 to 5): *The Titanic Lost...and Found***

### **Overview**

The first sample Questions for Life lesson covers an elementary school lesson plan developed by a reading specialist. In this third-grade lesson plan, which extends over several days, students read a book about the sinking of the *Titanic* and its later discovery in the ocean. The lesson could be adapted for fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms by adding information, increasing the difficulty of the questions, and/or posing additional questions for more in-depth discussion.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the lesson was for students to read, interpret, and critically analyze the information in a book titled *The Titanic Lost...and Found* by Judy Donnelly.<sup>1</sup> Each student had a laminated Questions for Life Cue Words card in the upper right-hand corner of his or her desk. As the teacher posed questions using Questions for Life strategies, students were encouraged to use the cue words she articulated in each question to identify the thinking process she asked for and respond accordingly.

### **Prior Knowledge**

To develop prior knowledge about the *Titanic*—or the “Wonder Ship,” as it was called—the reading specialist first showed students cross-sectional pictures of the ship. Discussion began with a focus on first-class accommodations, located on the ship’s upper decks and featuring luxuriously furnished rooms, including separate dining areas and music rooms. Then the discussion moved to a consideration of the accommodations and conditions on the lower decks that housed the third-class passengers. Students talked about how it would have been to travel in each of those sections of the ship (Perception).

Students were introduced to the word *titanic*, which derives from the Greek word *titan* (the Titans were giants in Greek mythology, so the word *titanic* means “huge” or “powerful”). Students gave their opinions about why *Titanic* was a good name for the ship (Evaluation). They then developed a mind map showing potential dangers at sea, including those that threatened a large ship like the *Titanic* (Analysis).

## **Section 1: The Wonder Ship**

### **Prior Knowledge**

After students read Section 1 of the book, the teacher posed questions using Questions for Life strategies. Constant referral to the laminated Questions for Life Cue Words card on each of their desks allowed students to become familiar with the cue words that signal the type of thinking required in the different questioning strategies.

## Questions for Life Row 1

Note that although the type of thinking is listed after each question throughout this lesson, the teacher did not tell the students what kind of thinking they were to do. The words in parentheses are there for the reader's benefit only.

1. What were the *reasons* the *Titanic* was called "The Wonder Ship"? (Analysis)

Sample response:

"The ship had many new features not found on older ships, including restaurants, a post office, a gym, and a swimming pool. It was like a floating palace."

2. *List* features that made the people on the *Titanic* feel safe. (Analysis)

Sample responses:

- "The ship had two hulls, one inside the other."
- "The lowest part of the *Titanic* had 16 watertight compartments. The captain could pull a switch to close off a compartment if it started to flood."
- "A thick steel door would shut and trap the water."
- "Two, three, or even four compartments could be flooded, and the ship would still float."

## Guided Visualization: Perception

To heighten students' perceptions of what traveling on the *Titanic* might have been like, and to help them imagine a sensory experience of the events in the story, the teacher led them through a guided visualization intended to elicit Perception.

Sample Visualization:

"The *Titanic* is ready to sail. Picture it as it pulls away from the dock. Notice the passengers outside on the decks. See their hands waving goodbye and throwing kisses to their friends and families. Hear the excitement of the crowds as they watch the huge ship begin its first voyage."

"How would you have *felt* if you were on the *Titanic*?"

Sample response:

"I would have been very excited to be on such a fancy new ship with so much to do and so many people to meet."

## Section 2: Iceberg

### Prior Knowledge

To develop prior knowledge about this section of the lesson, the reading specialist and her students talked about what can be done if a ship experiences trouble at sea. The reading specialist led the students to understand that people must rely on the expertise of those running the ship. One little girl said that it was the same as flying on an airplane: passengers

must rely on the experience of the captain like they rely on the pilot to help in case of an emergency (Insight).

### Questions for Life: Rows 1, 2, and 3

While encouraging students to refer to their Questions for Life Cue Words cards, the reading specialist then asked questions and told the students to identify and recite back to her the type of question asked before responding.

1. What *steps* were taken when the lookout spotted the iceberg? (Analysis)

Sample response:

“The question is an Analysis question because the word *steps* is a cue word for Analysis. The lookout became afraid and rang the alarm, crying out: ‘Iceberg straight ahead!’ The seaman turned the ship, but it was too late. The giant iceberg scraped along the side of the ship, causing damage.”

2. What *sequence* of events took place when the captain heard a grinding sound? (Analysis)

Sample response:

“That is an Analysis question too. The captain went below to assess the damage and realized the *Titanic* was badly hurt. Five of the watertight compartments were already flooded and nothing else could be done. The captain sent out an order to wake the passengers and radioed messages for help.”

3. What *insights* or *realizations* do you have about the passengers, who continued to laugh and listen to music even after the sailors ordered them to get into lifeboats? (Insight)

Sample response:

“You used the words *insights* and *realizations*, which call for Insight thinking. My insight is that the passengers were not worried because they felt that the *Titanic* could not sink.”

4. What *procedures* did the passengers follow to get into the lifeboats? (Analysis)

Sample response:

“*Procedure* is a cue word for an Analysis question. The women and children went first, and the men could get into a lifeboat only if there was room.”

5. What *generalizations* can you make about the experiences of the passengers on the lower decks as they tried to get up to the lifeboats? (Induction)

Sample response:

“You want us to use Induction. The passengers on the lower decks had trouble getting out because many of the staircases had already been blocked. They had to wait around because the first-class passengers had better access to help. On the whole, they became very scared.”

6. *In a nutshell*, what made communication poor with the neighboring ship, the *Californian*? (Summary)

Sample response:

“*Nutshell* means Summary! Although the *Californian* was less than 20 miles from the *Titanic*, the operator had turned off his radio. The crew of the *Titanic* had to set off rockets to let the sailors on the *Californian* know they were in trouble. The sailors on the *Californian* never realized that the *Titanic* needed help, maybe because they, too, thought the *Titanic* could never sink.”

7. *Sequence* the stages of the sinking of the *Titanic* from the time the lower decks were underwater to when it went down (Analysis).

Sample response:

“That’s an Analysis question. The lower decks were underwater, two lifeboats were left, and some people were jumping into the icy waters. Some of them reached lifeboats and others remained in the freezing water. Those in lifeboats rowed away from the *Titanic*. One end of the ship slid into the ocean. The other end swung straight up. Then the *Titanic* slid under the icy black water.”

8. The musicians playing on deck stopped playing happy music and started playing a hymn. What *insight* do you have about why the music changed? (Insight)

Sample response:

“That’s an Insight question. Here’s my realization: I think a hymn meant that all hope was lost, and the *Titanic* would soon sink.”

## Section 3: Never Again

### Prior Knowledge

Again, the reading specialist referred students to the laminated cards on their desks showing the Questions for Life model that would help to imprint the cue words into their memories. She wanted to ensure that as they heard or read the cue words in the questions, they would naturally and automatically respond with the thinking process triggered by the cue word.

### Questions for Life: Rows 1, 2, and 3

1. *Mind map* how the people in the lifeboats survived (Analysis).

Sample response:

After noting that they were being asked to use Analysis, students created a mind map, as follows:

- In a center circle they wrote, “How People Survived.”
- In an oval coming off the center they wrote, “Leaning,” for the men who leaned this way and that to help keep the boats from tilting.

- In another oval off the center they wrote, “Rescue,” for the one lifeboat that went back to save a man who was floating on a wooden door.
- In yet another oval they wrote, “Huddled for warmth.”

2. Summarize how the ship *Carpathia* rescued the survivors of the *Titanic*.

Sample response:

“I can do Summary! It took many hours to get the people on board. They had to lift them up to the deck one boat at a time. Everyone who climbed aboard was saved.”

3. What safety *procedures* changed after the *Titanic* disaster to make ships safer? (Analysis)

Sample response:

“That’s an Analysis question. There were only enough lifeboats for 1,178 of the 2,227 passengers on the *Titanic*, so procedures changed to require ships to have enough lifeboats to accommodate every single passenger. Ship radios had to stay on during the entire voyage. Every ship had to have a lifeboat drill so people would know what to do if there was an accident.”

4. What *changes* would you make to this list of procedures to make sure no other ships could sink at sea? (Idea)

Sample responses:

- “Here are my ideas. I would make everyone wear a lifejacket all the time, even when they were dancing.”
- “I would put more lifeboats on the ship so more people could get into them.”
- “People in lower decks would be able to get out from the bottom into boats, and people from the upper decks could get out by climbing into a helicopter.”

## Multiple Intelligences Centers: Action

After the class finished reading the story, the teacher assigned students to centers that matched Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligences. In these centers the students participated in the Action part of the Questions for Life model, as described below. The teacher used Action cue words, such as *create*, *draw*, *write*, *role-play*, *construct*. In most cases the Action was requested through a statement rather than through a question.

### Center #1: Bodily Kinesthetic/Musical/Rhythmic Intelligences

#### Prior Knowledge

The group at this center reviewed the fact that the radio aboard the *Titanic* was a wireless telegraph, a machine used to tap out and receive messages in Morse code (letters were replaced by “dots” and “dashes”). The students received a copy of the Morse code and were given time to learn which dot and dash symbols represented which letters.

### **The Action Statement**

The reading specialist gave the following statement requiring students to respond with Action: “Practice Morse code (used by the *Titanic* radio operators), then make up your own messages, and finally decode one another’s messages.”

Sample responses:

- A student demonstrated an SOS call: three taps, three dashes, and three taps.
- Students practiced with Morse code to write their own SOS messages.
- Students exchanged papers and decoded one another’s messages.

## **Center #2: Bodily Kinesthetic**

### **Prior Knowledge**

Having learned that the word *nautical* refers to water and ships, the students were given a list of nautical terms.

### **The Action Statement**

Students responded to the following Action statement: “*Create and act out a nautical game using symbols that represent nautical terms.*”

Sample response:

Students developed a game by creating motions to symbolize the nautical terms. For example, they created hand movements to represent hoisting *the sails*, *bailing*, and the locations of the *port* and *leeward* sides of a ship.

## **Center #3: Interpersonal Intelligence**

### **Prior Knowledge**

Students were told to work together to review the graphic in their text showing the cross sections of the *Titanic* and its various compartments. Students worked in pairs researching other views of the *Titanic* on the Internet.

### **The Action Statement**

Students responded to the following Action statement: “*Work in pairs to examine and discuss the various sections of the Titanic diagrams. Then pairs will come together to reach consensus on developing a drawing of the whole ship (or part(s) of it); label each area (for example, stateroom, restaurant, engine room, swimming pool).*”

Sample response:

The pairs decided together to diagram the lower parts of the ship where the engines were located, where the iceberg hit, and where the water first flowed in; they labeled each of these sections appropriately.

## **Center #4: Intrapersonal Intelligence**

### **Prior Knowledge**

Working individually, students skimmed the boldface headings of the story.

### **The Action Statement**

“Working quietly and individually, *write* open-ended entries in your journals about your own thoughts on taking a voyage that ended with such hardship.”

Sample response:

One student wrote in his journal about the time he fell down when he was pretending to be a “titan,” and how those who bragged about the *Titanic* probably felt very bad after it sank.

## **Center #5: Naturalist Intelligence**

### **Prior Knowledge**

Before the work in centers began, students made replicas of icebergs by freezing water in containers of various sizes.

### **The Action Statement**

“Using the ice you froze in containers, *sketch* a side view of what a floating iceberg might look like as it melts. *Analyze* and chart your results.”

Sample response:

Students measured each of their icebergs. They then put the icebergs into a pan of water and quickly sketched them as they began to melt. Then they removed them and measured them again. They repeated the procedure several times, writing down the changing measurements next to their drawings.

## **Section 4: Found at Last**

### **Prior Knowledge**

Students silently read the final part of the book, “Found at Last.” The following Questions for Life were asked when they finished.

### **Questions for Life: Rows 1, 2, and 3**

1. Robert Ballard had dreamed of finding the *Titanic* ever since he was a little boy. He pictured what it would look like and talked about it often. What *qualities* did his focus on the *Titanic* demonstrate about Robert Ballard? (Induction)

Sample response:

“*Qualities* means you’re asking an Induction question. From his focus on the *Titanic*, I would say Robert Ballard’s qualities were dedication and perseverance, because he was a scientist who continued to follow his dream. He was probably was really excited to finally discover the *Titanic*.”

2. *List* what Argo, the robot, could do underwater. (Analysis)

Sample responses:

- “You gave an Analysis statement. Argo could dive down very deep.”
- “The robot could take underwater video pictures.”
- “The pictures Argo took were sent to a TV screen on the ship.”

3. What did Robert and the other scientists *see* when they found the *Titanic* on the ocean floor? (Perception)

Sample response:

“You are asking us a Perception question. The *Titanic* had broken apart, so they saw its pieces. Robert saw the crow’s nest, where the lookout had first seen the iceberg. The giant anchors were there. Glass windows lay in the sand. There were bottles of wine, dishes, and suitcases on the ocean floor.”

4. Of all the messages Robert Ballard left behind, what was the *most* important? (Appraisal)

Sample response:

“You are asking for Appraisal. The most important message Robert Ballard left was that he wanted the great ship to be left in peace.”

5. *Predict* how the survivors might have reacted if they had been alive to learn about the discovery of the *Titanic* (Prediction).

Sample responses:

- “I need to do a prediction. I would predict that those who lost members of their families would have been very sad to be reminded of the tragedy.”
- “I believe there were some who would have still remembered how beautiful the *Titanic* was.”

### **Culminating Activity**

The reading specialist then asked her students to form groups and create five questions of their own based on the story. They were asked to use the Questions for Life cue words in each question. When they were finished, students joined another group and played a game in which they asked the other group their questions.

*Reference:*

Barkley, S. G. (2009). *Questions for life: Powerful strategies to guide critical thinking* (pp. 148-161). Cadiz, KY: Performance Learning Systems.