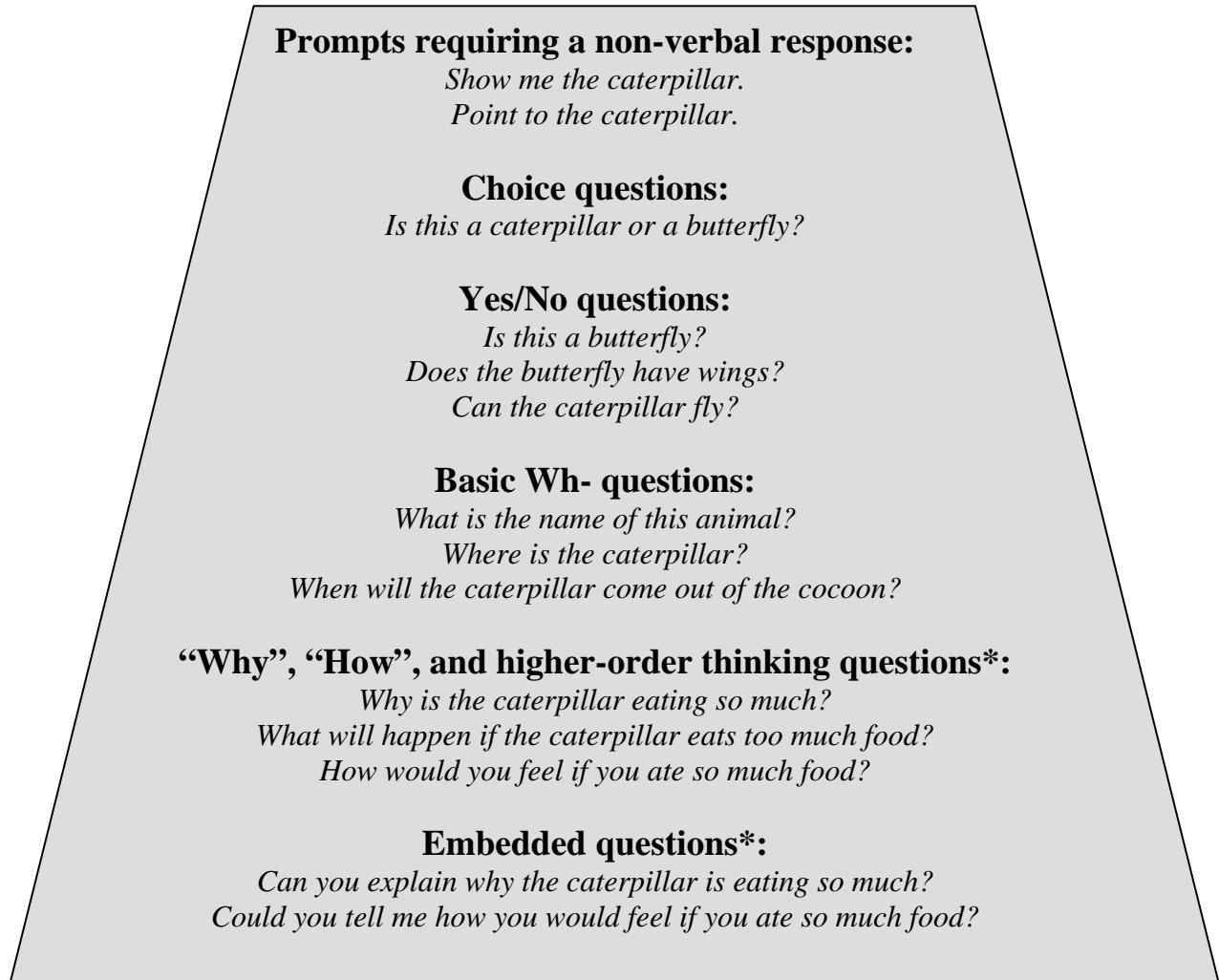


Questioning Strategies for English Language Learners

The pyramid below illustrates a continuum of question types that can be used to help teachers scaffold language for English language learners (ELLs). Questions at the top of the pyramid require the least amount of language production and are appropriate for beginning ELLs. Questions at the bottom require a higher level of language proficiency and are appropriate for advanced ELLs. Two other factors also influence how easy or difficult a question will be for a student: familiarity with the topic and complexity of the question. The more familiar the topic, the easier the question. The more complex the sentence structure, the more difficult the question.

As English language learners develop the ability to respond to simple types of questions, they should be challenged to respond to increasingly more difficult questions. They should be given multiple opportunities to practice *asking* various types of questions in different contexts. Finally, teachers should model--and involve peers in modeling--responses while encouraging ELL students to develop and extend their own answers to questions.

A Hierarchy of Questions: From Least to Greatest Difficulty



*Questions with modal verbs (e.g. *Could you...? How would you...?*) are generally more difficult than those with simple present, past, and future verbs (e.g. *Can you...? Will you...?*).

Strategies for Scaffolding Questions for English Language Learners*

The purpose of scaffolding questions is to adjust the language so that English language learners are able to comprehend and respond to what is being asked. As ELL students develop comprehension, the original question can be revisited. Provide additional support using peer modeling, integration of oral and written language practice, and nonverbal cues.

Sample Question 1*:

How are the personalities of the whale and the elephant the same?

Rephrase the vocabulary

- * How are the personalities—the traits (characters)—of the whale and the elephant the same?
- * In what ways are the whale and the elephant the same?

Familiarize the context through oral practice

- * What is your personality? Are you funny? Are you quiet?
- * Expand and develop student language by recasting and extending their responses. For example, the student says, *I am funny*. The teacher recasts: “**One aspect of your personality is that you are funny.**”

Simplify the question type and sentence structure

- * What is the elephant’s personality?
- * Is the elephant smart? Is he funny?
- * What is the whale’s personality?
- * Are they the same? How are they the same?

Sample Question 2*:

Which words does the author use to show the reader his attitude toward nature?

Rephrase the vocabulary

- * What words does the author (the writer) use to show the reader his attitude—his thoughts and feelings—about nature?

Familiarize the context through oral practice

- * What is nature? List (tell me) some examples.
- * What thoughts and feelings do you have about nature?
- * What is your attitude about nature?
- * How do you feel about the nature you see around you—the trees, animals, the ocean? Do you think these things are miraculous? What words describe how you feel?
- * Expand and develop student language by recasting and extending their responses. For example, the student says, *I like to smell the ocean*. The teacher recasts: **“Your attitude about nature is that the smell is an important part of why you and others like it.”**

Simplify the question type and sentence structure

- * What is the author’s attitude about nature?
- * Does the author think nature is a wonderful thing?
- * Does the author think that nature is the most wonderful thing or does the author think that nature is nothing special?
- * Which words does the author use to describe this attitude?
- * Which words express the author’s wonder: there is “nothing more miraculous” or “silvery greenish glow”? Show me where it says that.

* Sample questions from Grade 5 MSA Reading, <http://mdk12.org/mspp/k_8/pr_grade5_reading.html>