

## Scaffolding questioning

**By Joe Craven**

Scaffolding questioning by providing carefully considered prompts is an effective way to break problems or concepts down to support pupils' understanding. In the example I am about to talk through, the focus of the lesson is on early impressions of Macbeth, but the conceptual focus is: to what extent can a person be judged for their thoughts as well as their deeds?

I started by posing a closed question to the whole class:

**'When do we first find evidence of Macbeth's dark or evil thoughts?'**

The benefit of closed questions is they're quick and unambiguous. The straightforward answer that follows can provide a useful common foundation on which to build a more developed, more detailed and wider-ranging discussion.

Here, the closed question was directed at pupil 1 - a low- to mid-level attaining pupil who lacked confidence - to give them a sense of success at the beginning of the discussion. I was confident they would be able to answer this question because I circulated during the previous task to check.

The pupil responded by asking for clarification. Following the pupil's request, I rephrased the original question for him as:

**'In which scene do we first hear Macbeth saying that he has a dark side he's hiding?'**

It's the same question but put more simply. There's a shift from the more ambiguous 'when' to directing the pupil to identify a specific act or scene. I also hint that the evidence will be something Macbeth says.

He responded with the correct answer, so I increased the challenge by asking a slightly more open question to the class:

**'Can you think of a phrase or line in which we can find evidence to back that up?'**

After asking the question, I paused to ensure everyone was thinking of an answer before directing it to a different pupil – pupil 2.

From this, I confirmed her response and asked her a follow-up question to develop her thinking:

**'So what *could* Macbeth mean by that image of the 'black and deep desires', do you think?'**

I increased the challenge in this question by asking a more open question that relied on her interpretive understanding by using the word '*could*' rather than '*does*'. I also included technical vocabulary – the word 'image'.

I then increased the challenge in the question by making it more evaluative and asked a higher attaining pupil – pupil 3 - to extend their thinking:

**'Do you agree with that, Jack? What do you think about these 'black and deep desires'?''**

Jack's response suggested there might be more he could offer, so I prompted him to say more by restating:

**'In the dark?'**

I then asked him to further build on his idea with additional prompts, such as... **'because...?'** and **'...why...?'**

I then returned to pupil 1 and supported him in generating a question for the class to consider.

I find that pupils benefit from having the layered escalation from short, closed questions with markers such as 'when' or 'who' to more open questions and then to higher-order evaluation skills often beginning with 'why'.