

The 5 Essential Questions of Life

AI in Grades 4–9 Social Studies, Adapted

Dr. Rick Gilson · Alberta Professional Learning Consortium · 75 minutes

The curriculum is your anchor. AI is your collaborator.

The five questions keep both in their proper place.

Before we begin

A land acknowledgement — and the first question, already at work

I was born December 22, 1958 in Calgary, on Treaty 7 Territory — a treaty signed September 22, 1877 at Blackfoot Crossing between the Crown and the Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina Nations. I have lived on Treaty 6, Treaty 8, and again on Treaty 7.

I acknowledge that this land is also the historical and present-day Homeland of the Métis in present-day Alberta.

The rights, relationships, and responsibilities established by these Treaties predate my family's arrival. I live with inherited responsibilities to learn, act, and reconcile.

Notice what just happened

Every one of those dates and names is a claim that can be checked.

That habit — pausing to ask "wait, what is this actually saying, and how would I know?" — is the first of our five questions.

It is also the whole discipline of working with AI.

And it is Grade 4–9 Social Studies.

Laughter Is Medicine - Enjoy Indigenous Humour

Week #36

(two weeks from now...ironic?)

David write, "If you're not
laughing, you're going to cry.
I've heard it a lot in NDN
country."



Change Maker  **The Consortium**
Conversations in Education

**Canadian Author
David Robertson**

52
WAYS TO RECONCILE
HOW TO WALK WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
ON THE PATH TO HEALING

DAVID A. ROBERTSON

"I'm only one person but I'm still
one person. I can't do everything
but I can do something, and I can't
let the fact that I can't do
everything stop me from doing the
one thing I can do"
David quoting his Dad paraphrasing
Edward Everett Hale

#shareyouraction

<https://walkingeaglenews.com/>

Seventy-five minutes

Where we're going, Times are totally estimates - I am no way near capable of that level of accuracy ;-)

Opening	8 min	Orientation, where you are
Wait, what?	12 min	What AI is actually doing
I wonder...?	12 min	From command to conversation
Couldn't we at least...?	20 min	Grounded in your curriculum — live
How can I help?	8 min	Students, and coaching
What truly matters?	8 min	The part that isn't about tools
Close	7 min	Your Monday thing, and the links

Recorded — you can come back to any of it

Where are you in your AI journey?

Put a number in the chat — no wrong answers, and I mean that

1

**I know almost
nothing**

Never opened one, or tried
once

2

I've poked at it

A few questions, mostly
curiosity

3

I use it most weeks

Lesson ideas, rewriting,
summaries

4

It's in my workflow

Daily-ish, more than one
platform

5

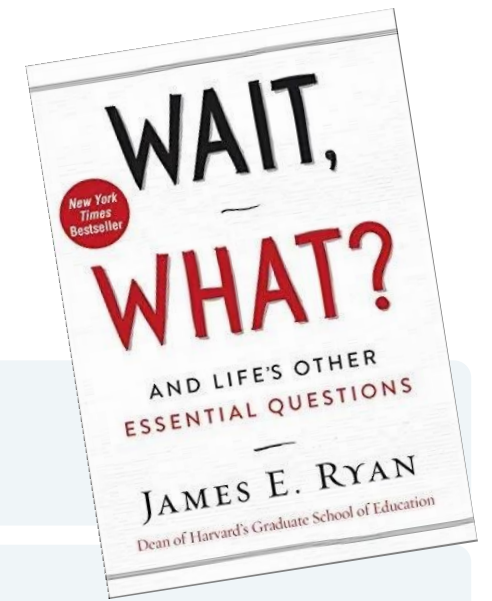
I build with it

Projects, Gems, custom
setups

Some of you are already using Brisk or Teacher Time Machine. That is a 4, not a shortcut — and we'll come back to what those tools do well.

Five questions, one spine

James Ryan asked them about a life. We're asking them about a curriculum and a machine.



1 Wait, what?

Understanding before judgement

2 I wonder...?

The heart of curiosity

3 Couldn't we at least...?

Getting unstuck, starting small

4 How can I help?

The base of every good relationship

5 What truly matters?

Keeping the big things big

1

Wait, what?

What is this machine actually doing when it answers me?

12 minutes

It is not looking anything up

The single most useful thing to understand, and it takes ninety seconds

What people assume

- It searches a database of facts
- It finds the right answer and returns it
- If it's wrong, the database was wrong
- It knows what it knows and doesn't know

What is actually happening

- It predicts the next most plausible piece of text
- Fluent and correct are two different achievements
- It is trained above all to be helpful to you
- Unconstrained, it will help — accurately or not

This is why it invents a citation rather than saying "I don't know." It isn't lying. It is doing exactly what it was built to do.

Wait, what?

Ingredients and recipe

Two things you control, and almost everyone only thinks about one

INGREDIENTS

What you give it

The curriculum document. The Organising Idea. The student sample. The article. The year plan. Actual files — not your memory of them.

RECIPE

What you tell it to do

The role, the audience, the format, the constraints — and crucially, what to do when it doesn't know something.

"When you find yourself staring at a nonsensical, incorrect, or utterly useless output, the problem is rarely that the AI has gone rogue. The problem is almost always that you have, unwittingly, fed it garbage." — Chris Penn

Helping the helpful be accurate

Three lines that change what you get back. Steal them.

1

Restrict the source

"Base your answer only on the uploaded documents and nothing else."

2

Licence the gap

"If the information isn't in the documents, say 'Not found in documents.' Do not guess."

3

Demand the receipt

"For each claim, cite the document name, the section, and a direct quote."

Also: turn the thinking model on. ChatGPT extended reasoning · Claude Thinking · Gemini Thinking. Slower, and markedly more careful.

2

I wonder...?

What if the prompt isn't a command at all?

12 minutes

Stop issuing orders. Start a conversation.

The single highest-leverage habit change in this session

"Now, ask me one question at a time until you have everything you need."

Why this works

- You rarely know your own requirements until asked
- It surfaces the context you'd have left out
- The machine builds the prompt with you
- You end up thinking harder, not less

What it looks like in a classroom

- This is the Socratic method, run backwards
- Model it aloud for a Grade 6 class once
- Students stop treating it as an answer machine
- "I wonder if..." becomes the sentence starter

Before you hit enter

Three questions, every time, until they're automatic

Could this be more specific?

"A lesson on treaties" versus "a 40-minute Grade 7 lesson on Treaty 6 for a class with four ELL students and no textbook."

What jargon have I omitted?

Organising Idea. Learning Outcome. KUSP. Guiding Question. The words that mean something precise in Alberta and nothing anywhere else.

What essential context is missing?

Your grade. Your community. Your timeline. What you already tried. What you are not allowed to do.

"Assume it knows nothing. Provide everything. Specificity is not just a technique; it is the governing principle of effective communication with generative AI." — Chris Penn

I wonder...?

"I wonder..." as a student move, ...and a teacher move

Grades 4–9 — where curiosity is still cheap and easy to spend

Grades 4–6

Ask it to be a place

"You are the Bow River in 1880. I'm going to ask you what you see." Students write the questions; the class judges which ones got the best answers.

Grades 7–9

Ask it to disagree

"Give me the strongest case against my position, then tell me which part of my argument is actually weakest." Source bias becomes visible rather than abstract.

Both moves put the student in the position of interrogator rather than recipient. That is the transferable skill — and it outlives whichever tool is fashionable in 2029.

3

Couldn't we at least...?

Stop trying to solve AI. Start one small thing that compounds.

20 minutes — the centre of the session

Four names, one idea

Every major platform now has this. How many of us, of your colleagues use AI at least 30 minutes a day?

Claude

Projects

Persistent instructions +
uploaded knowledge

ChatGPT

Projects / custom GPTs

Same idea; GPTs are shareable

Gemini

Gems + NotebookLM

Gems for voice; NotebookLM for
grounding

Copilot

Copilot Notebooks

Now in M365 Education A1, A3,
A5

The problem it solves

You re-explain yourself every single time you open a new chat. You re-upload the same curriculum file. You get a different voice and format on Tuesday than you got on Monday.

What changes

Instructions persist. Documents stay loaded. The work becomes something you pause and return to in November — not a conversation you lose. You are building a thinking environment, not asking a question.

Couldn't we at least...?

A word on Copilot

Most of your districts are Google. Some are Microsoft. Here's the honest comparison.

What Copilot Notebooks give you

- Workspaces built on your reference materials
- Custom instructions per notebook
- Mind maps, study guides, flashcards, quizzes
- Lives in the M365 app and in OneNote
- Included with Education A1, A3, A5 licences

What to know before you commit

- It is a wrapper, not a separate engine
- Runs on OpenAI models, with Anthropic added
- Reviewers report it favours uploaded files over links
- View-only sharing not available at time of writing
- Verify your district's actual licence first

So what happens to "use two different engines"?

The advice still holds — cross-check important work against a second model. But be aware that Copilot may already be running the same underlying model as one of your other tools. Different interface is not the same as different engine. Check the model picker.

Why plain text beats a Google Doc

The unglamorous habit that makes everything else work better

What a .md file is

- Plain text with a few symbols for structure
- # for a heading, * for a bullet. That's most of it
- Opens in anything, forever, on any device
- No formatting noise for the model to wade through
- Headings become structure the machine can navigate

Why it matters for this work

- Cleaner in, cleaner out — every time
- Obsidian's web clipper saves any article as .md
- Your curriculum notes stop living in twelve places
- Files you own, not files a platform lends you
- Portable between Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot

You do not need Obsidian to start. You need one folder and the habit of saving things as text.

Couldn't we at least...?

Live

The same question, asked twice

Bare chat

No documents. No instructions. Just the question, the way most people ask it.

Watch what it does with an Organising Idea it has never seen.

Grounded project

The 2026 draft curriculum loaded. Instructions set. Grounding prompt in place.

Same question. Watch the citations appear.

The gap between these two screens is the entire argument of this session.

Then — inside the project only — the Bow River, 1880.

Your Monday thing

Not a plan. One thing. Put it in the chat before you leave.

If you're at a 1 or 2

Open one tool. Give it the three grounding lines from earlier and one curriculum document. Ask it something you already know the answer to — and check its work.

If you're at a 3

Build one project. One. Load your grade's curriculum document and write three sentences of instructions about who you are and how you want to be answered.

If you're at a 4 or 5

Save one thing as .md and start the folder. Or take the project you already have and add the grade above and below yours.

Couldn't we at least agree that if our students aren't already using this, they will be?

Couldn't we at least...?

4

How can I help?

The question that stops us from rescuing people who didn't ask.

8 minutes

Experts in their own lives

The Saviour Complex, and why it shows up around technology more than anywhere else

The trap

- You see the struggle and reach for the fix
- You remove the productive part of the difficulty
- You solve a problem they didn't actually have
- The colleague nods, and never opens it again

The move

- Ask before you demonstrate
- "What would actually make this week easier?"
- Let them name the help they want
- Direction with humility — theirs, not yours

"AI has not arrived in every classroom yet — but it has almost certainly arrived in your students' homes."

5

What truly matters?

Keeping the big things big when everything is shouting.

8 minutes

It amplifies what's already there

Which means the question was never really about the technology

"It doesn't create good or evil. It takes the good and makes it better. It takes the bad and makes it worse."

Dr. Erskine, on the Super Soldier serum — and, it turns out, a workable description of generative AI

A teacher with a clear purpose

gets more of it, faster

A classroom without one

gets more noise, faster

Strong assessment practice

scales

Weak assessment practice

scales too

"Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?" — T.S. Eliot, 1934

Ninety-two years before anyone typed a prompt.

What truly matters?

The Inquiry-Driven Classroom: 5 Essential Questions for AI in Education

A Human-Centered Framework for Navigating AI Integration Using James Ryan's Five Essential Questions



CONTEXT SUMMARY

As generative AI transforms the K-12 landscape, educators face a tension between rapid technological shifts and the need for human-centered inquiry. James Ryan's five essential questions serve as a critical scaffold, moving schools from a "defensive" stance to a proactive, ethical, and visionary approach to AI.

SUPPORTING DETAIL: Use this question to pause, clarify, and audit AI outputs for hallucinations or biases before drawing conclusions.

DEFINED: Critical AI Literacy—Shifting from treating AI as an "absolute truth" machine to viewing it as a reflective, but flawed, human-created tool.

1. "Wait, what?"—The Anchor of Understanding

PAUSE

3. "Couldn't We At Least...?"—Start Small

SUPPORTING DETAIL: Build consensus by finding low-risk starting points for AI use, moving past polarization toward manageable progress.

5. "What Truly Matters?"—The Ultimate Compass

SUPPORTING DETAIL: Focus on whether AI supports deep learning and human connection, ensuring students feel "beloved" and respected.

2. "I Wonder...?"—The Engine of Curiosity

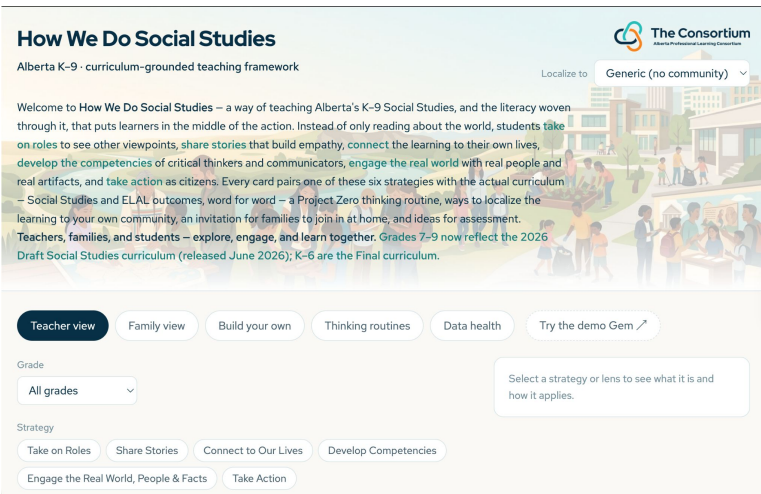
SUPPORTING DETAIL: Transform AI into a "thought partner" by using "I wonder if..." prompts to explore new directions and possibilities.

4. "How Can I Help?"—Relationship First

SUPPORTING DETAIL: Prioritize humility and student agency, using AI to enhance inclusivity and translation without replacing human empathy.

Focusing on "What Truly Matters" in Institutional Governance

Governance Domain	Trivial/Obsolete Focus	"What Truly Matters" Focus
Academic integrity	Detecting AI-generated text	Fostering digital citizenship and readiness
Curriculum	Disconnected disciplines	Learning "how to learn" and "how to be"
Success Metrics	Standardized test scores	Relationships developed and impact made



How We Do Social Studies - Alberta 2026

This Gem builds upon the work of the APLC Social Studies team utilizing an approach to teaching social studies that involves a range of lens and roles to explore the curriculum. It will provide you with ways that your students can: Take on Roles, Share Stories, Connect their Personal Experience, Develop Competencies, Engage with the Real World, Real People using Real Artifacts, and Take Action. Localize your prompt, play with the possibilities for more information visit <https://how-we-do-ss.netlify.app/>



Red Team Rudy: Your Assessment's Toughest Critic (and Biggest Fan) Thanks RB

Red Team Rudy - helps work through an assignment to reduce unwanted AI use and help direct students to learning

Recent

 Analyzing Parliamentary vs. Presidential Systems

Supporting every educator
in every classroom





Rick Gilson
Grandpa, Eternal Learner, Educator,
Certified Tiny Habits Coach, Consultant



AI Supports

June 2026 updated "How We Do Social Studies" Browser based resource

June 2026 updated SS K-9 Verbs & Concepts Browser based

June 2026 Updated AB SS I Need to Know - Knowledge web based

 GPT - Social Studies Current Events Lens Alberta SS 6-9

 GPT - Alberta K-9 Social Studies Curriculum Planner

 Gem Red Team Rudy - Help sharpen an assignment to reduce Student AI use

Supporting your Journey (click on each to access)

Social Studies Knowledge Companion

[A website to source vetted resources](#)

ALBERTA SOCIAL STUDIES · KNOWLEDGE COMPANION

I Need to Know (and understand)

A knowledge-focused digital companion to the Alberta Social Studies curriculum.

Social Studies K-9 · active build-out across all grades

Organized exactly like the curriculum – Grade → Organizing Idea → Guiding Question → Learning Outcome → Knowledge – and stocked with free, vetted resources (articles, books, images, maps, and video) to inform teachers, support families at home, and guide students. All grades, K-9, are being built out.

Social Studies Verbs & Concepts

[A site to explore the DOING Words of SS](#)



Alberta Social Studies K-9 – Verbs & Concepts

Welcome! This site explores the *doing words* of Alberta's K-9 Social Studies curriculum – the verbs that tell students what to do, and the concepts those verbs work with. In **Teacher view**, pick a grade to see its verbs grouped by thinking-skill family, each with the real skills-and-procedures statements behind it. In the **Home / Student view** (Grades 4-9), students and families explore what a verb asks of them – with a real task from their grade and the big idea it builds toward. Everything here comes straight from the curriculum; labels show what is final and what is still draft. Grades 7-9 now reflect the 2026 Draft curriculum (released June 2026). Have a look around – and tell us what you think with the feedback button.

K - 9 SS Curriculum Planner

[A GPT to “pin” and aid in your planning](#)



Alberta K-9 Social Studies Curriculum Planner

By Rick Gilson

Builds Alberta K-9 year, unit, and lesson plans aligned with the new curriculum

SS Current Events Lens for Gr 6 - 9

[A GPT to “pin” and connect current news](#)



Social Studies Current Events Lens Alberta SS 6-9

By Rick Gilson

Connects current Canadian news to Alberta Social Studies (Grades 6-9) and builds full lessons: curriculum match, activities, assessment, verified sources. For best results, give your grade and a time window (e.g., "Grade 7, past month"). Curriculum quoted verbatim; news pulled live.



Seventy-five minutes is a beginning - reach out any time.
Happy to learn from and with you.

Survey —>



Everything, in one place

linktr.ee/rickgilson

Reducing Hallucinations · Using AI Responsibly in the Classroom · Five Essential Questions through an AI and Coaching Lens · the open article library · Visiting With History

Shared under CC BY-NC-SA

Take it. Change it. Use it with your staff. Sharing is a great teacher tradition — and none of this is worth much sitting in one person's folder.

The recording will be there when you're ready for the parts that went too fast.

If you'd like to go deeper:

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Dr. Rick Gilson · APLC

Wait, what? · I wonder...? · Couldn't we at least...? · How can I help? · What truly matters?