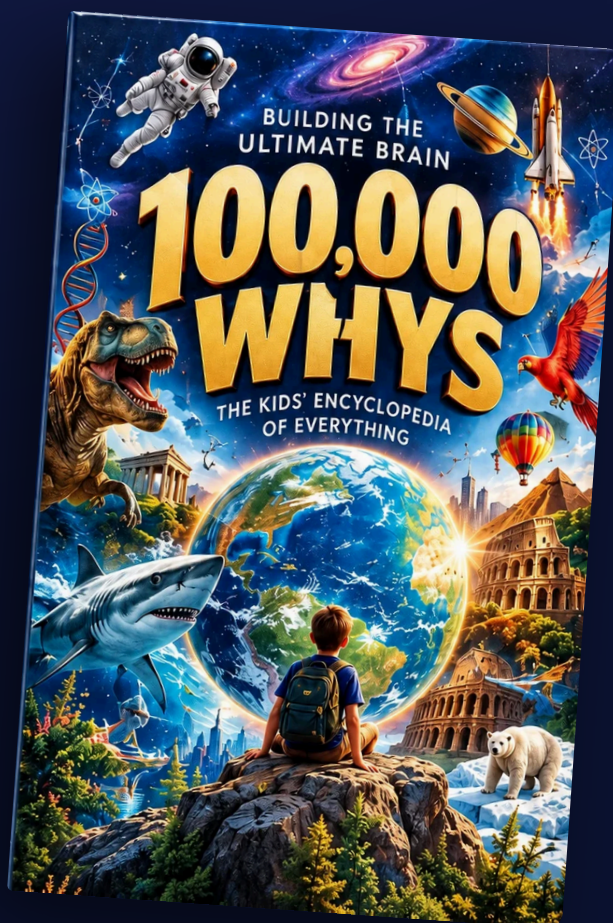


FREE COMPANION GUIDE

The Window

What every parent can do in the years when curiosity is easiest to build

A companion guide to 100,000 Whys: The Kids' Encyclopedia of Everything. Inspired by the ideas of Sir Ken Robinson.



For parents and grandparents of children aged 6 to 13 ·
curiocub.shop

A Note Before You Start

This book is short by design.

It is not a book to read. It is a book to use. The ideas in it are meant to be applied tonight — not next week, not when things calm down, not when you have more time.

You have a child. The child has a window. The window does not stay this wide open forever.

Everything in this book is built around that fact.

Read the first three chapters before you sit down with your child for the first time. Read the rest as you need them. Come back to the question bank whenever you run out of questions.

That is the whole instruction.

INTRODUCTION

What the Window Is and Why It Narrows

There is a period in every child's life — running roughly from age six to age thirteen — when children are especially open to something.

Not for memorization. Not for performance. Not for the things that schools measure.

For curiosity.

During these years, children are forming their default relationship with the world. Whether they see it as a place to be navigated or a place to be understood. Whether they treat an unanswered question as a problem to be avoided or an invitation to think. Whether, when they encounter something they don't know, their first instinct is to look it up or to look away.

This orientation — curious or incurious — is not fixed at birth. It is built. Mostly between six and thirteen. By the conditions a child lives in during those years.

This is the window.

As children move into their teens, habits settle and become harder to shift. Not impossible. Harder. A child who practises curiosity in these years tends to carry it into everything that follows — their schoolwork, their friendships, and the way they handle a world that keeps changing.

The window does not close overnight. But it narrows.

You are reading this because you have a child who is somewhere inside it.

Here is the thing that most parents don't know:

The window is not built at school.

School can support it. A good teacher can kindle it. But the place where the curiosity habit gets practised most is the home. Specifically: the conversations that happen around the dinner table. The questions that get asked and how they get asked. The model a child sees every day of what it looks like to wonder about something.

The school is a system. Systems optimize for what they can measure. They can measure performance. They cannot measure curiosity. Therefore, over time, every school system — however good — tilts toward performance. Correct answers. Reproducible results. The grade.

This is nobody's fault. It is the nature of systems.

But it means the curiosity habit is yours to build. Not the school's. Yours. Every evening. At the table. In the questions you ask and how you ask them.

This book tells you exactly how.

The Science You Need to Know

You do not need a PhD in developmental psychology to use this book. You need to understand three things. They are not complicated.

The First Thing: Curiosity Is a Habit, Not a Trait

When parents describe a curious child, they usually mean it the way they'd describe a child being tall. As if it's something the child was born with or without.

This is wrong.

Curiosity is a habit. It is a practiced relationship with not-knowing. A child who appears naturally curious has, almost always, been in conditions that rewarded and practiced the behavior of following a question. A child who appears incurious has, almost always, been in conditions that didn't.

This distinction matters enormously because habits can be built.

You are not hoping your child was born curious. You are building the habit. The two things require completely different approaches. Hoping requires nothing. Building requires the right conditions, consistently applied, over time.

The Second Thing: The Window Is Real

The period from six to thirteen is not an arbitrary range. It is when children's thinking grows fastest: they start to form theories, test ideas, and hold an open question in their heads.

At this age, children are still being shaped by what they experience. What they practise doesn't just affect what they learn. It affects how they learn — the habits that become their default way of engaging with the world.

As they get older, those habits settle. Not unchangeable — people learn and grow throughout life — but more settled. The habit of curiosity, if it hasn't been practised, takes more effort to build later.

The education thinker Sir Ken Robinson spent decades making a related point: “We don’t grow into creativity. We grow out of it; or rather, we get educated out of it.” The curious child who enters school at five has, by the time they leave, often had the curiosity systematically managed out of them by a system that rewards the right answer over the good question.

“We don’t grow into creativity. We grow out of it; or rather, we get educated out of it.” — Ken Robinson

The window is the period before that process completes. You are reading this while it is still open.

The Third Thing: You Don’t Need to Know the Answers

This is the most important and most misunderstood thing in this book.

Many parents assume that building their child’s curiosity requires them to have deep knowledge of science, history, or whatever topic is at hand. They assume they need to teach. They assume they need to know the answers.

They are wrong.

The parent who always has the answer provides a model that subtly undermines the child’s relationship with not-knowing. The child learns: there is always someone who knows. I don’t have to sit with the question. I just have to find the person with the answer.

What the curious child needs to see is an adult sitting comfortably with not-knowing. Following a question without being certain where it leads. Being interested in the attempt before the answer arrives.

You do not need to know why the sky is blue. You need to not-know it, together, in a way that models the pleasure of the question.

KEY POINT

The encyclopedia gives you the answer. Your job is to come to the question before it does.

The One Question

There is a question that works and questions that don't.

The question that doesn't work is: "How was school?"

You know this question doesn't work. You have been asking it for years. The answer is fine. Good. Nothing special. The answer is a report, not a thought. It is the minimum socially acceptable response to a question the child knows you're asking out of obligation.

The question that works is: "What are you wondering about?"

Or variations of it: What question has been in your head this week? What's something you've been thinking about that you can't let go of? What's something you noticed today that you didn't understand?

These questions work for a specific reason.

"How was school" asks the child to report. "What are you wondering about" asks the child to reveal. Reporting requires memory retrieval. Wondering requires the child to check in with their own interior experience — to locate something that has been active in their mind and bring it to the surface.

But here is the more important distinction:

"How was school" tells the child that what you're interested in is their performance in an external system.

"What are you wondering about" tells the child that what you're interested in is their mind.

The message the child receives from the second question — when it is asked consistently, genuinely, and without requiring a specific answer — is: I am curious about what you are curious about. Your wondering matters. You are the kind of person who wonders.

Over time, that message becomes self-fulfilling.

The Variation That Changes Everything

The question is powerful. But there is a variation that is more powerful still.

It is the question you ask before giving the child the answer.

Before you read the answer to any question — before you explain why the sky is blue, why we dream, why ice floats — you ask: What do you think?

Not: Do you know?

What do you think.

These are different questions.

“Do you know” asks for retrieved knowledge. The child who doesn’t know the answer has nothing to offer and learns that not-knowing is a failure state.

“What do you think” asks for a theory. The child who doesn’t know the answer still has a theory. Everyone has a theory. The theory might be wrong. Wrong is not a failure state. Wrong is the beginning of the process.

The child who is regularly asked “What do you think” — and whose answer is received with genuine interest, regardless of whether it’s right — learns something that years of formal education cannot teach: that their mind’s first attempt at an answer has value. That not-knowing is a starting point, not an endpoint. That the pleasure of the question comes before the relief of the answer.

This is curiosity. Not the possession of knowledge. The enjoyment of not-knowing-yet.

The Four Things That Make the Question Work

1. Ask it genuinely

The child can tell the difference between a parent asking out of obligation and a parent who is actually curious about what they think. You don’t have to perform enthusiasm. You have to actually want to know. If you can’t access genuine curiosity about the question, pick a different question.

2. Receive what comes without evaluation

When the child gives you their theory, your first response should not be right, wrong, almost, or good try. It should be a follow-up. Tell me more. What makes you think that. What happens if you take that further. The evaluation comes later, if at all. The conversation that begins with “tell me more” goes somewhere. The conversation that begins with “that’s close but” stops.

3. Model not-knowing yourself

Before the child answers, try the question yourself. Say: I actually don’t know why this happens. What do you think? Watching a parent sit comfortably with not-knowing is one of the most powerful things a child can experience. It tells them: uncertainty is not dangerous. It is interesting.

4. Let the question stay open

Not every session needs to end with the answer checked and confirmed. Some questions are more useful when they stay open for a day. Let the child sleep on it. Come back to it at breakfast. A question that lives in a child’s mind overnight is a question that is building something.

Night One

This chapter is for the first time you sit down with your child and the encyclopedia.

The first session matters. Not because everything depends on it. Because if the first session feels like homework, the child will associate the book with homework and the habit will be harder to build. If the first session feels like something genuinely interesting is happening, the child will come back.

What to Do

Do not announce it. Do not build it up. Do not say: we're going to do something that's really good for you. No child has ever been enthusiastic about something introduced this way.

Simply open the book at the table. Pick a page — any page, or one you've looked at in advance and found interesting. Read the question out loud.

Then close the book.

Look at your child.

"What do you think?"

Do not open the book again until the child has tried. This is the entire method. Everything else is variation.

What to Do When They Say "I Don't Know"

They will say this. Almost every child says it the first time. It is not genuine uncertainty. It is a social reflex — the child has learned that "I don't know" is the safe answer when you're not sure if your attempt will be judged.

The correct response is not to prompt them toward the right answer. It is to change the frame.

SAY THIS

"I know you don't know. What's your best guess?" Or: "I don't know either. Let's both try."

The last option is the most effective because it removes the social pressure entirely. If the parent doesn't know either, there is no right answer to fail to produce. There is only the shared attempt. When you say "I don't know either" and mean it, something changes in the child's face. The performance anxiety dissolves.

What to Do When Their Theory Is Wrong

Receive it. "Tell me more about that."

Let them extend the theory. Often, in extending it, they find the flaw themselves. The most satisfying intellectual experience a child can have at the dinner table is noticing their own error and correcting it before you do.

If they can't find the flaw, you can ask: "What would have to be true for that to work?" This often surfaces the gap without you naming it.

If the theory is simply wrong, do it warmly and briefly: "Here's what I'd add to that..." — and then open the book to check together. Make the checking collaborative. The book is not the authority proving the child wrong. The book is the tool you use together.

What to Do When the First Session Falls Flat

Sometimes it does. The child is tired. You picked the wrong question. The timing was off. Five minutes of silence and a vague answer and everyone goes back to their dinner.

This is not failure. This is week one.

Do not discuss it. Do not explain to the child why it matters. Simply do it again the next day with a different question. The habit is not built in one session. It is built in ten. Then twenty. The first session only has to be not-bad. Not-bad is enough to come back to.

The One Thing That Ruins Night One

Telling the child in advance that it's educational.

If the child thinks you are doing this for their development, they will approach it the way they approach homework — as something to complete correctly and be done with. The curiosity habit cannot be built through compliance. It can only be built through genuine engagement.

THE FRAME

I found something interesting. — NOT — I found something good for you.

Your Child's Type

Children come to this differently. The method is the same for all of them. The approach shifts.

Here are the five types you are most likely to be working with. Most children are a combination of two of them.

Type One: The Performance-Oriented Child

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

They always want to know if their answer is right before they continue. They are reluctant to commit to a theory without confidence. They look at you after each sentence to check your reaction. They may refuse to guess at all if they're not fairly confident.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

This child has been shaped by a system — usually school, sometimes home — that rewards correct answers and treats wrong ones as failures. They have learned that the social cost of being wrong is real. They are managing that cost by not risking the attempt.

THE ADJUSTMENT

Give them explicit permission to be wrong. Say it directly: "There is no right answer in this. A wrong guess is more interesting than no guess." Then prove it by receiving their first theory — however wrong — with genuine interest: "Interesting. What made you think that?" Do this consistently and the performance orientation will soften over three to four weeks.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not correct them quickly. Do not finish their theories for them. Do not show them the right answer before they've extended their own.

Type Two: The Shy or Quiet Child

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

They wonder privately but don't share. They give minimum answers in group situations but talk more one-on-one. They may have been mocked at school for saying the wrong thing and have learned to keep their interior world interior.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

Curiosity is running — often at high intensity — but privately. They have learned that public wondering is socially risky. The intervention is not to increase their confidence in public settings. It is to create a private setting where the audience is one safe person.

THE ADJUSTMENT

Do this one-on-one, not at a family dinner where siblings might react. Start with questions about things the child has already demonstrated interest in. The familiar territory makes the attempt feel safer.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not push them to share more than they're comfortable with. Do not do this in front of siblings who might tease. The volume of their sharing will increase naturally as the setting proves safe.

Type Three: The Anxious Child

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

They worry before you begin about whether they'll get it right. They may become distressed when they don't know. They catastrophize wrong answers. They may be in therapy for anxiety already.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

This child has the same cognitive engine as a highly curious child — the tendency to follow a thread intensively, to be unable to let a question rest. The engine is running toward worry rather than wonder. The intervention is to redirect the engine, not to slow it down.

THE ADJUSTMENT

Pick questions that have no obvious right answer — philosophical questions, design questions, why-do-you-think questions where there are genuinely multiple valid approaches. Explicitly separate the wondering from the correctness: “This question doesn’t have a single right answer. I want to know what you think, not what’s true.”

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not let the anxiety manage the session. If the child says “I don’t know” and becomes visibly stressed, sit with the discomfort briefly — model that not-knowing is tolerable — then redirect: “What would you guess if you had to?”

Type Four: The Screen-Saturated Child

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

They are resistant to anything that isn’t a screen. They find books boring on principle. Their attention span for non-screen activities has shortened.

WHAT’S HAPPENING

Screens provide continuous novelty and immediate reward with no sustained uncertainty. The session you’re creating offers sustained uncertainty that resolves into understanding. This is a superior experience but the child has been calibrated for the inferior one.

THE ADJUSTMENT

Keep sessions very short at the start. Five minutes. One question. The goal of the first two weeks is not curiosity-building — it is tolerance-building. You are lengthening the child’s window for sustained engagement before the reward arrives. The curiosity, once sparked, will compete with screens on its own terms.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Do not frame this as an alternative to screens. Do not make the two things compete explicitly. Simply make this the thing that happens at the table.

Type Five: The Child Who Has Already Stopped

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

They are eleven or twelve. The questions have already mostly stopped. They give the minimum answer to everything. They have not asked a question nobody told them to ask in longer than you can remember.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

The curiosity habit has not been built during the window it was supposed to be built in. The child is not incurious. They are unpracticed. The habit has gone quiet.

THE ADJUSTMENT

Do not try to build the habit at the dinner table in front of others. One-on-one, a quieter moment. Pick your first question very carefully — something close to a genuine interest this child already has, so the topic provides some of the pull the habit can't yet provide. Be explicit that you don't know the answer either. This child especially needs to see the adult modelling not-knowing before they will risk it themselves.

TIMELINE

With this child, expect four to six weeks before you see genuine curiosity emerging unprompted. It is not too late.

Age by Age

The question is the same at every age. The approach shifts.

Ages Six to Eight: The Wonder Years

Children this age are close to their natural wondering. They have not yet been fully shaped by the performance demands of school. Their default is still closer to curiosity than to compliance.

WHAT THEY NEED

Freedom to be completely wrong. Short sessions. Physical connection to the questions — they understand the world through touching it and seeing it. When possible, connect the question to something they can observe. If you're talking about why leaves change color, do it in front of a tree.

HOW LONG

Ten to fifteen minutes is enough. A single question, explored fully, is better than three questions skimmed.

WHAT WORKS

Silliness. This age finds absurd questions irresistible. Why do we have eyebrows? Why does glue not stick to the inside of the bottle? What would happen if gravity worked sideways? The more unexpected the question, the more engaged they are.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Abstract questions. Questions that require holding multiple things in mind simultaneously. Questions about the distant future or the deep past. Ground everything in the immediate.

THE MARKER OF SUCCESS

The child starts asking questions you can't answer. Not from the book. Their own. This is the spark catching.

Ages Nine to Eleven: The Building Years

This is the peak window. The child is old enough to hold complex ideas, young enough that the curiosity habit is still highly buildable. This is the period of highest leverage.

WHAT THEY NEED

Longer threads. At this age, the child can follow a question from dinner to breakfast and back again. Encourage this. When they come back to something they were thinking about yesterday, receive it as the most important thing on the table.

HOW LONG

Fifteen to twenty minutes is natural. The conversation can go long if it's alive. Don't cut it off for the sake of routine.

WHAT WORKS

Questions that connect to their existing interests but extend them. A child who loves sport: why do some teams perform better under pressure? A child who loves art: why do humans find some faces beautiful and others not? The question that starts in familiar territory and moves somewhere unexpected is the most powerful one at this age.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Questions that are clearly designed to be educational. Children at this age are sophisticated enough to recognize when they're being taught and will resist it.

THE MARKER OF SUCCESS

The child brings questions to you that you didn't prompt. They've been thinking about something since Tuesday and they bring it to Friday dinner. When this happens, treat it as more important than anything else on the table.

Ages Twelve to Thirteen: The Final Window

This is the last stretch of the window. If your child is in this range, tonight is a good night to start.

WHAT THEY NEED

To be treated as a thinker, not a student. At this age, being taught is insulting. Being asked — genuinely asked, by someone who wants to know what they think — is compelling. The distinction matters enormously.

HOW LONG

There is no maximum. If the conversation is alive, follow it. A twelve-year-old who is genuinely engaged will talk for an hour. Do not interrupt it.

WHAT WORKS

Questions that have real stakes. Why do some people know what they want to do with their lives and others never figure it out? Why do humans need to belong to groups? Why do some people handle failure and others don't? These are real questions. Ask them as if you want to know. Because you should.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Anything that feels like remedial curiosity-building. This child will not respond to being shown a page about why leaves change color. They need questions that respect their emerging maturity.

THE MARKER OF SUCCESS

The child asks you questions that make you think. Real questions. Questions they've been carrying. This is the window's last gift.

When It Stops Working

It will stop working. This is not a prediction. It is a certainty. Every family doing this hits a wall — usually in the third or fourth week. The session falls flat. The child is disengaged. The question lands in silence.

This is not failure. This is the moment when most parents give up — and the moment when the habit is most fragile and most worth protecting.

Why It Happens

Novelty has worn off

The first two weeks worked partly because they were new. When the newness goes, the habit has to carry itself, and the habit isn't fully formed yet. This is the hardest moment.

You picked the wrong question

Some questions land and some don't. If three sessions in a row have fallen flat, try a completely different topic. Try asking them to pick the question.

The format has gotten routine

The child has figured out the pattern and it has become a drill. Drills don't build curiosity. Break the pattern. Let the child read the question. Let them ask you a question instead.

Something is wrong that has nothing to do with the book

Children who are struggling at school, with friendships, with anxiety, will disengage from dinner conversations before they disengage from anything else. If the stall is sudden and complete, ask what's actually going on before you try to fix the sessions.

What to Do

Do less, not more

When the sessions stall, the temptation is to push harder. This makes it worse. Do less. Shorter. Quieter. Let a session be three minutes and one question with no follow-up. Let it be enough.

Skip a day explicitly

Say: “We’ll do this tomorrow.” The child who knows the sessions will return tomorrow is more likely to bring something to tomorrow’s session than the child who can’t escape tonight’s.

Let the child take over

Say: “It’s your turn to ask me something.” The child who asks the question is in a completely different relationship to the conversation than the child who answers one.

Come back to something they left unfinished

“I’ve been thinking about what you said on Tuesday. I think I have a different idea now. Want to hear it?” The child who discovers that you were still thinking about what they said three days ago is the child who will come back.

Never end a stalled session with explanation or pressure. End it with a question left open. The open question keeps the session alive in the child’s mind after it’s formally over.

For Grandparents

If you are reading this as a grandparent, you have a specific situation that none of the other chapters fully addresses. This one is for you.

You have less time than a parent. You may have a different relationship with the child. You may worry about overstepping the parents. You may have health considerations. You are aware, in a way that parents often aren't, that time is finite and the years are going.

What You Have That Parents Often Don't

Unhurried time. When a grandparent sits with a grandchild, neither of them is thinking about the next thing on the list in quite the same way a busy parent is. The unhurried quality of grandparent time is an asset for this work. The curiosity conversation needs space. You often have space that parents don't.

The Gift That Outlasts You

Ken Robinson wrote about the importance of kindling a child's curiosity in their most formative years as "a gift that will sustain them in a lifetime of learning." For grandparents, the gift framing is not metaphorical. The curiosity habit you build now will outlast you.

"Kindling your children's curiosity in their most formative years is a gift that will sustain them in a lifetime of learning." — Ken Robinson

The grandparent who kindles a child's wondering at eight years old is giving something the child will carry at thirty, at fifty, at eighty. This is the specific nature of the grandparent's contribution. Not the school run. Not the logistics. The gift that travels forward.

You Do Not Need to Know the Answers

Grandparents sometimes worry that they are not up-to-date enough — that the world has moved on, that their knowledge is outdated. This concern is, in the context of this work, entirely misplaced. The goal is not to give the child information. The goal is to model not-knowing-and-wondering.

A grandparent who has lived eighty years and still finds the world worth investigating is one of the most powerful models a child can have. Your age is an asset. Use it.

The Practical Structure for Grandparents

One question per visit. Or two pages at bedtime when you're there for the night. Or a question on the phone call. The format can be adapted to whatever your access looks like. The key is consistency across whatever access you have.

What to Do If the Parents Are Unsure

Some parents are ambivalent about grandparents doing this. The simplest approach is to frame it not as educational but as something you and the child enjoy together. You are not building their curiosity development. You are reading a fascinating book together. Lead with the pleasure, not the program.

THE GRANDPARENT'S QUESTION

What is the one thing you most want to give this child that will still be with them long after you are gone? The answer is the habit of curiosity. It is available to anyone who asks the right question at the right moment. You have the moments. Ask the question.

The Question Bank

One hundred questions, organized by age group and topic.

These are starter questions. They are not from the encyclopedia. They are questions to open a session, to get the child thinking before you open the book, or to use on evenings when you haven't had time to prepare a page.

Read through them. Mark the ones that fit your child. The best questions are the ones that feel genuinely open to you — questions you actually don't know the answer to. If a question already feels closed to you, skip it.

For Ages Six to Eight

Questions About Bodies and Nature

1. Why do you think we have to sleep?
2. Why do you think cats purr?
3. Why do you think we sneeze?
4. Why do you think the sky is blue in the day and black at night?
5. Why do you think some animals have stripes?
6. Why do you think fish don't drown in water?
7. Why do you think we get goosebumps?
8. Why do you think some birds can't fly?
9. Why do you think dogs wag their tails when they're happy?
10. Why do you think teeth fall out when you're young?

Questions About Feelings and People

1. Why do you think we laugh when something is funny?
2. Why do you think it feels good to help someone?
3. Why do you think some things feel scary even when they're not dangerous?
4. Why do you think babies cry instead of talking?
5. Why do you think we get embarrassed?

Questions About the World

1. Why do you think some countries are cold and others are hot?
2. Why do you think the ocean is salty?
3. Why do you think there are different languages?
4. Why do you think fire goes up instead of down?
5. Why do you think rainbows always have the same colors in the same order?

Questions About Things They Use

1. Why do you think wheels are round?
2. Why do you think glasses help people see?
3. Why do you think soap makes things clean?
4. Why do you think glue sticks things together?
5. Why do you think music makes people want to move?

For Ages Nine to Eleven

Questions About Science and Nature

1. Why do you think some animals live in groups and others live alone?
2. Why do you think the moon looks different every night?
3. Why do you think some materials conduct electricity and others don't?
4. Why do you think earthquakes happen?
5. Why do you think some medicines only work for some people?
6. Why do you think humans sleep so much less than most animals?
7. Why do you think evolution produced so many different kinds of creatures instead of one perfect kind?
8. Why do you think some foods taste sour and others taste sweet?
9. Why do you think we age?
10. Why do you think some memories stay forever and others disappear within minutes?

Questions About People and Society

1. Why do you think some people seem to know what they want to do with their lives and others never figure it out?
2. Why do you think sports exist in every culture?
3. Why do you think people need to belong to groups?
4. Why do you think some ideas spread everywhere and others disappear?

5. Why do you think fairness matters so much to people?
6. Why do you think music exists in every human culture?
7. Why do you think some people seem more creative than others?
8. Why do you think humans have been to the moon but not to the deep ocean?
9. Why do you think art has existed since the earliest humans?
10. Why do you think people are afraid of different things?

Questions About Learning and Thinking

1. Why do you think some people find learning easy and others find it hard?
2. Why do you think we get better at things the more we practice?
3. Why do you think some lessons stay with you forever and some disappear?
4. Why do you think reading a story can make you feel things as strongly as if they're real?
5. Why do you think some people are more confident than others?

Questions About the Future and Ideas

1. Why do you think some inventions change everything and others don't?
2. Why do you think some countries develop faster than others?
3. Why do you think humans have always tried to explain where we came from?
4. Why do you think we find some things beautiful and others ugly?
5. Why do you think some people become leaders and others follow?

For Ages Twelve to Thirteen

Questions About Identity and Purpose

1. Why do you think some people seem to know who they are and others spend their whole lives figuring it out?
2. Why do you think the things that are hardest to do are often the most worth doing?
3. Why do you think humans need to feel that their lives have meaning?
4. Why do you think some experiences change people permanently and others barely leave a mark?
5. Why do you think some people seem to get better at handling failure and others don't?

Questions About the World and Society

1. Why do you think some societies become more free over time and others don't?
2. Why do you think people believe things that aren't true even when the evidence is clear?
3. Why do you think inequality persists even in places where people believe in equality?
4. Why do you think war has existed in every human civilization?
5. Why do you think some people change their minds and others never do?

Questions About Knowledge and Understanding

1. Why do you think some scientific discoveries take centuries and others happen quickly?
2. Why do you think the same event looks completely different depending on who you ask?
3. Why do you think mathematics can describe the physical world so precisely?
4. Why do you think art can communicate things that words can't?
5. Why do you think humans are the only species that has history?

Questions About Human Nature

1. Why do you think people are capable of both extraordinary kindness and extraordinary cruelty?
2. Why do you think we care so much about what other people think of us?
3. Why do you think some people seem to need less approval than others?
4. Why do you think empathy — the ability to feel what others feel — exists?
5. Why do you think humans are the only animals that feel guilt?

Questions With No Single Answer

1. Is there a version of you that made different choices somewhere? Would that still be you?
2. If everything you experience is processed by your brain, how do you know the world is what you think it is?
3. Why do you think we find some things funny? Is there a reason?
4. What would have to change for the world to be completely fair?
5. If you could understand one thing completely — one mystery resolved absolutely — what would you choose?

Questions to Ask Yourself at Any Age

These are questions to try before the child does — to model not-knowing and to access your own genuine curiosity.

1. Why do I find some things beautiful and others not?
2. What do I believe that I've never questioned?
3. What is a question I've been carrying for years?
4. What is something I learned recently that changed how I see something else?
5. What do I wish I had been more curious about when I was young?

CLOSING

What You Are Building

You are not building a smarter child.

You are not building a child who does better in school, though that may happen. You are not building a child who knows more facts, though they will. You are not building a child who performs better on assessments, though the curiosity habit tends to produce that too.

You are building something more specific and more lasting.

You are building a child who, when they encounter something they don't understand, leans toward it rather than away from it.

You are building a child who, when they don't know the answer, experiences the not-knowing as interesting rather than threatening.

You are building a child who, at twenty-five and forty and sixty, still finds the world worth investigating.

This is what the curiosity habit produces. Not a grade. A life. A particular kind of life — one in which the questions keep coming, in which uncertainty is tolerable, in which the next thing is always potentially interesting.

The easiest years for building it are roughly six to thirteen. After that, habits settle and the building takes more effort.

You have time.

But only what you have.

Use the dinner table. Open the book. Ask the question. Let them try.

The window is open.

The 100,000 Whys Children's Encyclopedia contains over 200 topics and more than 1,000 illustrated entries across science, nature, history, the human body, and the world. Use the question before the answer. Every time.



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