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The Inquiry Playbook

A Practical Companion
for IB Educators



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A PRACTICAL COMPANION FOR IB EDUCATORS

The Inquiry Playbook

What inquiry really looks like — and what to do tomorrow morning. Runnable plays, ready tools, and IB-grounded practice across every programme.

PYP

MYP

DP

CP

Dr. Maged Abdallah

A companion volume to “Approaches to Teaching in Action”

C FRONT MATTER

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About this resource

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Acknowledgements

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● HARVARD PROJECT ZERO · HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Several routines in Part 1 are Visible Thinking / Thinking Routines developed by Project Zero, a research center at the Harvard Graduate School of Education: See, Think, Wonder; Claim, Support, Question; Connect, Extend, Challenge; Tug of War; Headlines; and I Used to Think... Now I Think... The Chalk Talk routine is also published by Project Zero, which adapted it from Hilton Smith of the Foxfire Fund.

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● THE RIGHT QUESTION INSTITUTE

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Source material

This playbook draws on three IB publications — *Learning and teaching*, *Inquiry learning progressions*, and *Using AI in inquiry* — together with one companion volume, *Approaches to Teaching in Action*. IB content is paraphrased and translated into classroom practice rather than reproduced.

C FRONT MATTER

Why this playbook exists

Most teachers do not reject inquiry. They get stuck on two quieter questions: “What does this actually look like in my room?” and “What do I do on Tuesday with twenty-eight students and a syllabus to cover?” This book is built to answer those two questions on every page.

Inquiry is not a fashion the IB has borrowed. It is one of the six Approaches to Teaching (the one listed first), and “inquirer” is among the ten learner profile attributes (also listed first) — we set out to grow *inquirers* — and it runs as a thread through Approaches to Learning. When you teach through inquiry you are not importing a foreign idea; you are doing the thing the IB already asks of you, in language you already own.

The companion to this playbook, *Approaches to Teaching in Action*, maps all six approaches across the programmes. This volume takes the first approach and goes deep: it turns the principle of “teaching based on inquiry” into a set of moves you can run, observe, and refine. Where the parent book gives inquiry a chapter, the playbook gives it a toolkit.

● THE PROMISE OF A PLAYBOOK

A playbook is not a manifesto; it is a collection of **plays** — discrete routines you can pull off the shelf and run without reading the whole book first. Each play in Part 1 sits on a single card: the hook, what you say, what students do, how long it takes, and what “good” looks like.

Use it however you like. Read it cover to cover, or open it to one play before a lesson. Keep it in your planning folder, photocopy the templates, scribble in the margins. It earns its place only if it changes what happens in the room.

FRONT MATTER

How to use this playbook

The book has a **shared spine** and four **programme branches**. The spine holds the principles and practices that travel across IB classrooms. The branches translate them into the local dialect of your programme.

IF YOU WANT TO...	GO TO
Understand what inquiry is and isn't	Part 1, §1–§2
Write better questions and units	Part 1, §3
Change what you say and do in the room	Part 1, §4 and the plays in §5
Assess and document inquiry honestly	Part 1, §7
Handle AI in an inquiry classroom	Part 1, §8
See it in your programme	Part 2 (PYP / MYP / DP / CP)
Start on Monday and build a culture	Part 3

How to read a play card

NAME & TAG — what the play is called and where it sits on the inquiry continuum.

HOOK — the move that opens it; the provocation or prompt.

TEACHER MOVES — what you do and the exact words you might use.

STUDENT MOVES — what learners are doing while you facilitate.

TIMING — a realistic clock, not an ideal one.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE — the signal that the play is working.

Cards are deliberately programme-neutral. Each programme branch in Part 2 points you to the plays that travel best there, with examples in the right register.

A note on sources

Three IB publications and one companion volume provide the principal foundations for this playbook. IB guidance is paraphrased and translated into classroom moves rather than reproduced; the four sources are:

SOURCE	WHAT IT CONTRIBUTES HERE
<i>Learning and teaching (PYP)</i>	The spirit of inquiry; the asking–thinking–doing process; the continuum from structured to open; the seven specified concepts; central ideas and lines of inquiry.
<i>Inquiry learning progressions</i>	A skills-based way to assess and document growth across ages 5–16 — the backbone of §7.
<i>Using AI in inquiry</i>	The AIquiry framework, the Machine Agency in Learning Scale, and the risk of “mechanized convergence” — the basis of §8.
<i>Approaches to Teaching in Action</i>	The parent volume; this playbook is the deep dive on its first approach and cross-references it throughout.

Where a section leans directly on an IB publication, a “From the source” note marks it. Quotations are kept short; the substance is reworked into practice.

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PART ONE

The Shared Spine

Principles and practices that travel across IB classrooms — whatever the programme, whatever the subject, whatever the age.

IN THIS PART

01 The Spirit of Inquiry

02 The Inquiry Continuum

03 Concept-Driven Inquiry

04 The Teacher's Role

05 The Plays

06 Inquiry, Reflection & Action

07 Assessing & Documenting Inquiry

08 Inquiry in the Age of AI

09 Troubleshooting & FAQ

C SECTION 1 • THE SHARED SPINE

The Spirit of Inquiry

Inquiry is central to teaching and learning across all IB programmes and is one of the six IB approaches to teaching: learners are actively involved in their own learning and take responsibility for it. It is less a method you switch on than a stance you teach from.

At its simplest, inquiry is the interplay of three things: *asking* (inquiry), *thinking* (reflection) and *doing* (action). These are not three steps in a line. They loop. A question leads to investigation, which prompts reflection, which provokes a new question or a decision to act — which raises fresh questions again. Hold on to this loop; it is the backbone of every play in this book and the antidote to inquiry that fizzles out after the “fun activity” at the start of a unit.

● FROM THE SOURCE • LEARNING AND TEACHING

The IB frames the inquiry process as the interplay between **asking, thinking and doing** — a constructivist cycle that leads toward open classrooms where different views and perspectives are valued. It is purposeful and authentic, and it builds capacity through learner agency: **voice, choice and ownership**.

What inquiry is not

Inquiry is often confused with its cousins. The confusion matters, because each look-alike quietly drops the thing that makes inquiry powerful.

OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR...	BUT THE DIFFERENCE IS...
“Hands-on” or activity-based learning	Busy hands are not the point. What distinguishes inquiry is the attempt to draw meaning out of the experience through continual reflection. Without reflection it is just an activity.
Discovery learning	Discovery often chases a pre-set answer the teacher already has in mind. Inquiry treats questions as a means to construct new understanding, not to find the “right” box.
Problem-based learning	Problems are one trigger for inquiry, not the only one. Inquiry can equally be provoked by curiosity, wonder and joy — and it foregrounds the learner’s agency, not just the teacher’s problem.
Letting go / “anything goes”	Inquiry is highly intentional. Teachers plan deliberately, teach explicitly when needed, and scaffold hard. Agency is designed, not abandoned.

Move from → move towards

One of the most useful self-audits in the IB literature is a simple contrast between habits to move away from and habits to move toward. Read it not as judgement but as a compass.

MOVE FROM	MOVE TOWARDS
Inquiry as a timetabled activity at a fixed time	Inquiry as a continuous process of learning
Fixed time frames and prescribed stages	Open-ended time frames and flexible processes
One style of inquiry used as a recipe	Conscious choices between guided and open inquiry to fit the purpose
A linear path of inquiry, then reflection, then action	An ongoing loop of asking, thinking and doing
Concepts and questions used to find pre-set answers	Concepts and questions used to construct new understanding
Assessment as the final phase	Assessment as ongoing and integral, informing next steps
Action planned by the teacher at the start	Responsible, learner-initiated action emerging throughout
Learners as recipients of teaching	Learners as active partners in constructing meaning

Agency: voice, choice, ownership

Agency is the engine under the whole machine. When learners have a say in what they pursue (voice), a real choice in how they pursue it, and genuine ownership of the outcome, inquiry sustains itself. When those three are missing, even a beautiful provocation collapses into compliance. Most of the facilitation moves in §4 and the plays in §5 are, at heart, small machines for handing voice, choice and ownership back to learners.

● TRY THIS FIRST

Before your next unit, mark one place where you currently supply the answer and turn it into a place where students supply a question. That single swap is inquiry in miniature.

SECTION 2 · THE SHARED SPINE

The Inquiry Continuum

Inquiry is not one thing you either do or don't. It runs along a continuum from tightly structured to more open and student-directed, and good teachers move deliberately along it depending on the purpose — not as a recipe, but as a series of choices.

LEVEL	WHO SETS THE QUESTION	WHO SETS THE METHOD	BEST FOR
Structured	Teacher	Teacher	Novice inquirers; building a shared skill or protocol; safety-critical or technique-heavy tasks.
Guided	Teacher	Students (with scaffolds)	The everyday workhorse — students design the investigation around a question you frame.
Open	Students	Students	Mature inquirers; culminating work where genuine personal curiosity drives the question.

• FROM THE SOURCE · LEARNING AND TEACHING

The PYP names **guided inquiry** as its leading approach: it scaffolds learners' thinking so they can gradually construct more complex understanding, while teachers also create openings for open, learner-initiated inquiry. So the aim is not to race to "open" — it is to choose the right point on the continuum for the purpose in front of you.

Where open inquiry naturally lives

Open inquiry is not the trophy at the end of a ladder; it is a tool with a right time. Across the programmes it has natural homes:

- **PYP** — the Exhibition, where students drive a collaborative inquiry of their own.
- **MYP** — the Personal Project, and increasingly student-shaped lines within units.
- **DP** — the Extended Essay and the open-ended questioning of Theory of Knowledge.
- **CP** — the Reflective Project, an inquiry into an ethical dilemma the student chooses.

Notice the pattern: open inquiry is where the system already trusts students most. The job of structured and guided inquiry, every day before then, is to build the skills that make open inquiry achievable.

A 60-second self-audit

For the unit you are planning next, ask:

- Who is generating the questions — me, or the students?
- Who decides how the investigation runs?
- Is the level I've chosen a deliberate fit for the purpose, or just my default?
- Where is the one place I could safely hand over more — the question, the method, or the way learning is shown?

● RULE OF THUMB

When students are new to a skill, structure it. When they have the skill but not yet the judgement, guide it. When they have both the skills and the judgement, hand over more control while continuing to provide feedback and support. The continuum is a dial, not a destination.

C SECTION 3 · THE SHARED SPINE

Concept-Driven Inquiry — the engine

Inquiry without concepts drifts into trivia-hunting. Concepts are what let understanding transfer — from this case to the next, from this subject to another, from school to the world. They are the engine that turns activity into understanding.

Central idea and lines of inquiry

In the PYP, a unit of inquiry is organised around a *central idea*: a substantial, open-ended statement, written in a neutral voice, that learners explore rather than simply confirm. From it run a small number of *lines of inquiry* — the avenues students travel to build the central understanding. A good central idea invites students to recognise patterns, make generalisations and predictions, and transfer understanding to new contexts.

● TEST YOUR CENTRAL IDEA

Does it invite exploration, connection, interpretation and transfer — rather than simply being confirmed? A worthwhile central idea opens a unit up; if a statement merely reports a fact and offers little room for connection, interpretation or transfer, it is unlikely to sustain a strong unit of inquiry.

The seven specified concepts (PYP)

The PYP frames inquiry through seven specified concepts, each carrying a signature question. They are not a checklist to tick but lenses to think with — pick the one or two that open your content most.

CONCEPT	DRIVING QUESTION	THE UNDERSTANDING IT OPENS
Form	What is it like?	Everything has features that can be observed, described and categorised.
Function	How does it work?	Everything has a purpose, role or way of behaving that can be investigated.
Causation	Why is it as it is?	Things do not just happen; actions have causes and consequences.
Change	How is it changing?	Change is movement from one state to another — universal and inevitable.
Connection	How is it linked to other things?	We live in a world of interacting systems where one element affects others.
Perspective	What are the points of view?	Knowledge is not neutral; different viewpoints lead to different interpretations.
Responsibility	What are our obligations?	People make choices based on values, and those choices have impacts.

The MYP uses its own framework of key and related concepts, while DP and CP subjects draw on discipline-specific organising ideas. The underlying move is the same across programmes: choose a concept, and let it frame the inquiry.

Factual → conceptual → debatable questions

The most portable questioning tool in the IB is the trio of question types. Used together they take students from knowing, to understanding, to judging.

TYPE	WHAT IT DOES	EXAMPLE (MIGRATION)
Factual	Builds the knowledge base; has findable answers.	Where have people migrated from and to in the last century?
Conceptual	Pushes toward transferable understanding.	How does migration reshape a community's identity?
Debatable	Invites argument, evidence and multiple defensible positions.	Do nations have a duty to open their borders?

A unit that lives only in factual questions never takes off. A unit that jumps straight to the debatable, with no factual floor, collapses into opinion. Sequence them.

| Crafting an inquiry-worthy question

Before a question goes on the wall, run it past this checklist:

- **Open** — it cannot be closed with a single fact or a yes/no.
- **Conceptual** — it points at an idea that transfers beyond this case.
- **Connected** — it ties to content students will actually study.
- **Provocative** — a real person could care about the answer.
- **Honest** — you do not already have the “correct” answer in your back pocket.

C SECTION 4 · THE SHARED SPINE

The Teacher's Role — facilitation moves

The shift to inquiry is mostly a shift in what you do and say minute to minute. You are not abandoning teaching; you are spending your expertise differently — on provocation, on questioning, and on handing thinking back to learners.

Four things a facilitator does

- **Provoke** — spark interest and create productive tension with a stimulus, a contradiction, an artefact, a question.
- **Connect** — group and regroup learners so ideas meet, relationships build, and shared interests surface.
- **Investigate alongside** — resource the inquiry, model the moves, and intervene with a prompt rather than an answer.
- **Reflect** — protect time for the thinking that turns experience into understanding.

Talk moves: the words to use

Facilitation is mostly language. Keep a short bank of stems within reach until they become automatic.

- “What makes you say that?”
- “How could we test that?”
- “What would change your mind?”
- “Who sees it differently?”
- “Say more about...”
- “What’s your evidence?”
- “Can you build on what they said?”
- “What are you assuming there?”
- “What does this remind you of?”
- “What’s still puzzling you?”
- “If that’s true, then what?”
- “Where could we look to find out?”

● THE MOST UNDERUSED MOVE

Wait time. After you ask a real question, count silently to five before rescuing the silence. The thinking happens in the gap you are tempted to fill.

Just in time, not just in case

There is a real role for direct, explicit teaching inside inquiry — a mini-lesson, a demonstrated technique, a key piece of vocabulary. The trick is timing. In an inquiry classroom, explicit teaching happens “just in time”, at the moment a learner needs it to move forward — not “just in case”, frontloaded before anyone has a reason to care. Same content; entirely different effect.

● FROM THE SOURCE · LEARNING AND TEACHING

Direct teaching belongs in inquiry classrooms: teachers direct learning with “careful prompts at strategic times,” with the whole class, a small group, or an individual — wherever it is needed to help a community build shared understanding.

Holding the messy middle

Every honest inquiry has a stretch where it feels like nothing is converging. This is not failure; it is the part where understanding is actually being built. To hold your nerve: narrate the mess (“this is the confusing part, and it’s where the learning is”), shrink the next step, return to the driving question, and resist the urge to hand over the answer to relieve your own discomfort.

C SECTION 5 • THE SHARED SPINE

The Plays — your runnable toolkit

This is the part you came for. Each play is a self-contained routine you can run tomorrow. None of them require a special unit, a device, or a free afternoon — just the willingness to ask before you tell.

Quick-pick index

WHEN YOU WANT TO...	REACH FOR...
Fill a spare 10 minutes with real thinking	Notice & Wonder · Connect-Extend-Challenge · Exit Reflection
Launch a unit	Provocation Launch · See-Think-Wonder · QFT
Get students generating their own questions	QFT · Notice & Wonder · Wonder Wall
Deepen reasoning with evidence	Claim-Support-Question · Socratic Circle · Chalk Talk
Explore a debatable question	Tug-of-War · Socratic Circle
Cross-pollinate ideas between groups	Gallery Walk · Chalk Talk
Build a concept from the ground up	Concept Attainment · See-Think-Wonder
Close a lesson by reflecting	Connect-Extend-Challenge · Exit Reflection

1 • Provocation Launch

STRUCTURED-GUIDED · LAUNCH A UNIT

HOOK Open with a stimulus that creates tension — a startling image, a short clip, an object, a contradictory pair of quotes, a “mystery” data set — and say nothing about what it “means.”

TEACHER MOVES Show the stimulus. Ask only: “What are you noticing? What are you wondering?” Resist explaining. Capture every question verbatim where all can see.

STUDENT MOVES Observe, react, and pose questions. Don’t solicit hands-up “right answers” — focus on observations and genuine questions.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Students argue about what they’re seeing; questions outnumber answers; at least one wondering points straight at your central idea.

Timing 10–20 min · **Pairs with** Wonder Wall (to hold the questions), QFT (to refine them)

2 • See-Think-Wonder

STRUCTURED • OBSERVATION

HOOK A single rich image, artefact, or specimen worth looking at slowly.

TEACHER MOVES Walk the three prompts in strict order: “What do you see?” (only observation, no interpretation) → “What do you think is going on?” → “What does it make you wonder?” Hold the line between seeing and thinking — that boundary is the skill.

STUDENT MOVES Record observations before interpretations; turn interpretations into testable wonderings.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Students catch themselves jumping to conclusions and return to evidence; wonderings are grounded in something actually seen.

Timing 10–15 min • **Builds** the Observation progression (§7) • **Source** Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

3 • Notice & Wonder

STRUCTURED • QUESTION GENERATION

HOOK Any prompt — a problem with the question removed, a graph with no title, the first paragraph of a text.

TEACHER MOVES Two columns: I notice... / I wonder... Collect quietly first (sticky notes or whiteboards), then pool. Treat every wondering as legitimate.

STUDENT MOVES List noticings, then convert at least two into wonderings; star the one they most want answered.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Quiet students contribute on paper before the confident ones speak; the class’s own questions set the agenda.

Timing 8–12 min • **Great for** the spare ten minutes

4 • Question Formulation Technique (QFT)

GUIDED • STUDENT-OWNED QUESTIONS

HOOK A “question focus” — a single statement, image or phrase (not itself a question) that points at the content.

TEACHER MOVES Four rules, stated up front: ask as many questions as you can; don’t stop to answer or judge; write each exactly as asked; change statements into questions. Then have groups improve questions by switching them between open and closed, and finally prioritise three.

STUDENT MOVES Generate, categorise (open vs closed), rewrite, and choose — then plan a next step for their top question.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Students notice how rephrasing a question changes what it can reveal; the prioritised questions could genuinely drive a unit.

Timing 25–40 min • **Builds** the Questioning progression (§7) • **Source** QFT, Dan Rothstein & Luz Santana, Right Question Institute

5 • Wonder Wall

ONGOING • CURATING CURIOSITY

HOOK A permanent, visible space (wall, board, shared doc) where questions live for the length of a unit.

TEACHER MOVES Post the questions a provocation generated. Revisit weekly: which can we now answer? which got richer? which new ones appeared? Move answered questions to a “we figured this out” zone.

STUDENT MOVES Add questions any time; claim a question to investigate; mark questions as answered with evidence.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE The wall fills and shifts over time — visible proof that questions, not just answers, drive the room.

Timing 5 min/week to maintain • **Pairs with** Provocation Launch, QFT

6 • Claim–Support–Question

GUIDED • REASONING WITH EVIDENCE

HOOK A source, data set, text or phenomenon that invites interpretation.

TEACHER MOVES Ask for a claim (an interpretation), its support (the evidence), and a question the claim raises. Insist the question be genuine — something the claim leaves unresolved.

STUDENT MOVES State a defensible claim, cite specific evidence, and surface what they still don't know.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Claims are tethered to evidence rather than assertion; the “question” step keeps inquiry open instead of prematurely closing it.

Timing 15–25 min • **Strong in** MYP/DP analysis tasks • **Source** Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

7 • Connect–Extend–Challenge

STRUCTURED • SYNTHESIS & REFLECTION

HOOK A piece of new learning — a reading, a lesson, an experience — to make sense of.

TEACHER MOVES Three prompts: How does this connect to what you already knew? How does it extend your thinking? What now challenges you or leaves you puzzled?

STUDENT MOVES Link new to prior knowledge, name a shift in thinking, and articulate a lingering difficulty.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE The “challenge” column is full — a sign students are at the edge of their understanding, not coasting.

Timing 8–12 min • **Great for** closing a lesson • **Source** Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

8 • Chalk Talk (Silent Conversation)

GUIDED • SURFACING EVERY VOICE

HOOK One or more big questions written in the centre of large sheets around the room.

TEACHER MOVES Rule: no talking. Students write responses, and respond to each other's writing, with markers. You circulate and add provoking questions in the margins — in writing.

STUDENT MOVES Write ideas, draw lines connecting others' comments, ask written follow-ups, push back respectfully.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Threads branch and cross; students who rarely speak aloud leave substantial thinking on the page.

Timing 15–20 min • **Builds** the Role- and turn-taking progression (§7) • **Source** Project Zero (adapted from Hilton Smith, Foxfire Fund)

9 • Socratic Circle

GUIDED–OPEN • DIALOGIC REASONING

HOOK A debatable question and a shared text, case or data set everyone has prepared.

TEACHER MOVES Inner circle discusses; outer circle observes the quality of dialogue (evidence used, perspectives invited, questions asked) and feeds back. You stay almost silent — your job is to protect turn-taking, not to steer the verdict.

STUDENT MOVES Reason from evidence, build on and challenge peers, invite quieter voices, then swap roles.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Students reference each other (“building on what Sara said...”), positions shift in light of evidence, and no single voice dominates.

Timing 30–45 min • **Natural home in** TOK, MYP/DP humanities & literature

10 • Tug-of-War

GUIDED • EXPLORING TENSIONS

HOOK A genuine dilemma framed as two opposing pulls (e.g. “progress” vs “tradition”).

TEACHER MOVES Draw a rope across the board with the two ends labelled. Students place reasons along the rope — closer to an end = stronger pull. Then ask for the “what if” tugs that complicate the picture.

STUDENT MOVES Generate reasons for each side, weigh their strength, and identify where they personally stand and why.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Students hold two valid positions in tension rather than rushing to a winner; nuance appears in the middle of the rope.

Timing 20–30 min • **Feeds** debatable questions (§3) • **Source** Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

11 • Gallery Walk

GUIDED • PEER CROSS-POLLINATION

HOOK Group work-in-progress posted around the room.

TEACHER MOVES Groups rotate, examine peers’ thinking, and leave structured feedback — one strength, one question, one suggestion (sticky notes). Close with each group reading and responding to the feedback they received.

STUDENT MOVES Critique constructively, borrow ideas openly, and revise their own work in light of what they saw.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Feedback is specific and kind; groups visibly change their work after the walk.

Timing 20–30 min • **Pairs with** any investigation or design task

● MAKE YOUR OWN

These thirteen are a starter deck, not the whole game. A blank play-card template lives in §15 — when a routine works in your room, write it up and add it to the deck.

12 • Concept Attainment

STRUCTURED • BUILDING A CONCEPT

HOOK Curated “yes” and “no” examples of a concept (e.g. examples and non-examples of a system, a fair rule, a primary source).

TEACHER MOVES Reveal examples one pair at a time, sorted into “yes” / “no” without naming the concept. Students infer the defining attributes, then test a new example and finally name and define the concept themselves.

STUDENT MOVES Hypothesise the rule, refine it as evidence accumulates, and articulate the concept in their own words.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE Students arrive at a robust definition they built — and can defend why a borderline case is in or out.

Timing 15–25 min • **Powers** concept-driven inquiry (§3)

13 • Exit Reflection

STRUCTURED • CLOSING THE LOOP

HOOK The last five minutes of a lesson.

TEACHER MOVES Pick one frame: “I used to think... now I think...” (tracks conceptual change), or “Headline” (sum up today’s learning in a newspaper headline), or “one question I’m leaving with.”

STUDENT MOVES Name a shift in their thinking, or distil the big idea, or carry a question forward to the Wonder Wall.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE You leave with a quick read on where understanding actually landed — and tomorrow’s lesson half-planned.

Timing 3–5 min • **Doubles as** formative evidence (§7) • **Source** “I Used to Think... Now I Think...” and “Headlines” — Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education

C SECTION 6 • THE SHARED SPINE

Inquiry, Reflection & Action

Reflection is not a nice-to-have at the end of inquiry — it is one of the defining features that distinguishes sustained inquiry from isolated activity. And action is where understanding proves itself. Together they close the asking–thinking–doing loop.

Reflection: a distinguishing feature

Recall the distinction from §1: an activity becomes inquiry only when learners draw meaning out of the experience through continual reflection. That means reflection cannot be a single journal entry stapled to the end. It is woven through — pausing mid-investigation to ask “what are we actually learning here?”, revisiting a question to see how the answer has changed, naming a shift in thinking out loud.

Practical ways to keep reflection continuous rather than bolted-on:

- **Micro-reflections** — 60 seconds, mid-lesson: “What just changed in your thinking?”
- **Return visits** — bring an early question back onto the table a week later and compare answers.
- **Thinking made visible** — “I used to think... now I think...” as a recurring frame, not a one-off.
- **Process talk** — reflect on *how* the inquiry is going, not only what was found.

From inquiry to action

Successful inquiry tends to spill into action — and action, in turn, sparks new inquiry. The most powerful action is initiated by learners, not assigned by the teacher at the start. It might deepen the learners' own learning, or reach outward to have a social or ecological impact. Either way it grows from voice, choice and ownership.

TYPE OF ACTION	WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE
Participation	Joining or contributing to something already happening in the community.
Advocacy	Speaking, writing or campaigning to change minds on an issue the inquiry surfaced.
Social entrepreneurship	Designing a small initiative or solution to a real need.
Lifestyle & choices	Changing one's own behaviour in light of what was understood.
Further inquiry	Action that opens a new question — the loop turning over again.

• KEEP ACTION HONEST

Resist scripting the action in advance “so it's tidy.” Learner-initiated action is messier and smaller — and it is real. Action is most authentic when learners have meaningful voice and ownership — even when you provide structure, possibilities or support, as younger or less experienced groups often need.

Inquiry journals

A running journal — on paper or digital — is the simplest home for reflection and action. Useful prompts to seed it: *What I'm wondering now* · *What I tried* · *What surprised me* · *What I changed my mind about* · *What I'll do next*. The journal also becomes documentation you can assess (§7) without inventing extra paperwork.

SECTION 7 · THE SHARED SPINE

Assessing & Documenting Inquiry

“How do I assess inquiry without killing it?” is the most common — and most reasonable — worry teachers raise. The answer is to assess the skills of inquiry as they grow over time, not to reduce a single wondering to a grade. The IB gives us a ready-made spine for this: the inquiry learning progressions.

● FROM THE SOURCE · INQUIRY LEARNING PROGRESSIONS

The progressions are skills-based descriptions of what inquiry looks like across ages 5–16. They are deliberately **not** tied to grade levels or fixed timeframes: a learner may sit at one point for a long while, or work across several at once. Their purpose is to build a **“portrait of an inquirer”** — where a learner has been, where they are now, and where they are heading.

Four progressions to watch

Rather than assessing “inquiry” as one blurry whole, watch a handful of concrete skills develop. Four anchor the framework:

PROGRESSION	WHAT YOU’RE WATCHING GROW	A PLAY THAT BUILDS IT
Questioning to explore & play with ideas	From scattered curiosity toward purposeful, increasingly sophisticated questions.	QFT · Notice & Wonder
Observation	From naming what is obvious toward careful, evidence-rich noticing.	See-Think-Wonder
Decision-making	From impulsive choices toward reasoned, criteria-based decisions.	Claim-Support-Question · Tug-of-War
Role- & turn-taking	From parallel play toward genuine collaboration and shared inquiry.	Chalk Talk · Socratic Circle

The progressions also map onto Approaches to Learning skills (research, thinking, communication, social, self-management), so documenting inquiry overlaps with documenting ATL (though the two are not automatically equivalent).

Assess growth, not compliance

Three habits keep inquiry assessment honest:

- **Document, don't just grade.** Photos, journal pages, a noted comment in a Socratic Circle, a starred question on the Wonder Wall — these are evidence of where a learner is on a progression.
- **Focus on the next step.** Feedback that names the next point on a progression (“you’re asking great factual questions — what would a conceptual one sound like?”) moves learning; a score does not.
- **Hand the progressions to students.** When learners can see the skill they’re growing, they can set their own goals — assessment as learning, not just of it.

A simple inquiry rubric

When you do need a rubric — for a unit task or an exhibition — assess the process alongside the product. A lightweight frame (an author-developed formative tool — not an official IB rubric, and no substitute for programme or subject assessment criteria):

DIMENSION	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	STRONG
Questioning	Asks closed, surface questions	Asks open questions; some conceptual	Asks and refines conceptual/debatable questions
Investigation	Follows steps given	Designs a workable method with support	Designs and adapts method independently
Evidence & reasoning	States opinions	Supports claims with some evidence	Weighs evidence; considers other views
Reflection	Recounts what happened	Notes what changed in thinking	Reflects on process and transfers insight
Action	Acts only if directed	Takes suggested action	Initiates responsible, self-chosen action

SECTION 8 · THE SHARED SPINE

Inquiry in the Age of AI

Generative AI can supercharge inquiry — or quietly hollow it out. The difference is whether the tool extends a learner’s thinking or replaces it. This section gives you two IB frameworks for telling them apart, and practical guidance for the classroom.

THE CORE RISK · MECHANIZED CONVERGENCE

When learners reach for a machine to generate ideas *before* doing their own thinking, two things happen: each learner explores fewer of their own ideas, and the group as a whole produces a narrower range of ideas — everyone drifts toward the same machine-suggested answer. This narrowing is called **mechanized convergence**, and it is the opposite of what inquiry is for.

Offloading vs. replacement

Using a tool to **offload** effort is natural and often fine — we’ve always used tools to remember, organise and extend ourselves. The danger is **task replacement**: when the tool does the very thinking the task was designed to grow. The question to keep asking is simple: *is the tool doing work that assists the learner, or work that was the point of the learning?*

The Alnquiry framework

The IB reframes working with AI as itself an inquiry process — four moves you can teach students to make, in any order:

MOVE	WHAT STUDENTS DO
Iterate	Commit to repeated cycles — refine prompts and outputs rather than accepting the first answer.
Question	Pursue curiosity; pose questions of increasing complexity to the tool.
Debunk	Check and correct the tool’s claims and assumptions so outputs are authentic and accurate.
Collaborate	Bring the work back to other humans — to check data, test designs, and think together.

| The Machine Agency in Learning Scale (MAiLS)

Not all tools take the same amount of thinking from a learner. The MAiLS lines tools up by how much *agency* they ask the learner to hand over. The more agency the machine holds within a task, the greater the potential risk to learner agency and independent thinking.

Less machine agency

More machine agency →

Pencil → Videoconferencing → Video games → Intelligent tutor → Chatbot

The scale isn't a ban list — it's a decision aid. If a tool sits far to the right of the scale for a task that was meant to build thinking, you have two moves: change the task (redesign it around inquiry, e.g. with AInquiry) or change the tool (choose one lower on the scale), and tell students why.

| Practical guidance

- Make thinking visible: require students to show their process, including the prompts they used.
- Talk about the thinking, not just the output — build in conversation and listening.
- Use AI after first thinking, not instead of it, to protect against convergence.
- Check the IB's academic-integrity requirements before allowing AI tools in any IB-assessed task — what's fine for formative practice may not be permitted for assessment.
- Weigh the wider implications too: privacy and data protection, bias and transparency, accessibility, and the need for meaningful human oversight of AI outputs.

• A NOTE ON YOUNGER LEARNERS

The research the IB cites suggests the cost to critical thinking is strongest for younger learners. The younger the student, the more carefully AI use should be limited and scaffolded.

C SECTION 9 • THE SHARED SPINE

Troubleshooting & FAQ

The honest answers to the worries that keep teachers from starting.

"What if students go off-track?"

Off-track is often on-track in disguise — a tangent can be the real inquiry. When it genuinely drifts, don't yank the wheel; return to the driving question ("how does this connect to what we're trying to understand?") and let students decide whether to park the tangent on the Wonder Wall or follow it.

"How do I cover the curriculum?"

Inquiry isn't slower content delivery; it's deeper. Use explicit teaching "just in time" to deliver required content efficiently inside the inquiry, and lean on concepts (§3) so understanding transfers — meaning you teach the idea once and it pays off across many cases.

"What about my quiet students?"

Inquiry can actually serve them better than discussion-heavy teaching, *if* you build in silent and written channels. Notice & Wonder, Chalk Talk and Exit Reflection let quiet students think on paper before — or instead of — speaking aloud.

"I don't have time for all this."

Start with one ten-minute play, once a week. Inquiry is a dial, not a switch — you do not have to convert every lesson. Sustained time matters for deep units, but the habit is built in small, repeatable moves.

"Isn't this just discovery learning with a new name?"

No — and the difference is the whole point (see §1). Discovery often hunts a pre-set answer with little scaffolding. IB inquiry is highly scaffolded, foregrounds reflection, and treats questions as tools to build new understanding, not to locate the teacher's answer.

"How do I grade it fairly?"

Assess the skills of inquiry as they grow (the progressions, §7), and the process alongside the product. Document evidence as you go so the "grade" rests on a body of observed growth, not a single performance.

"My students just want to be told the answer."

That's a learned habit, and it unlearns. Begin with structured inquiry so the ask is small and safe, narrate why you're doing it, and protect the discomfort of the "messy middle" (§4) instead of relieving it with answers. Agency grows from repeated, survivable practice.



PART TWO

The Programme Branches

The same principles from Part 1, spoken in each programme's own language — with the plays that travel best, and a worked example to copy.

IN THIS PART

10 Inquiry in the PYP

11 Inquiry in the MYP

12 Inquiry in the DP

13 Inquiry in the CP

C SECTION 10 · PROGRAMME BRANCH

Inquiry in the PYP

Inquiry is most explicitly foregrounded in the PYP — it is the leading pedagogical approach, and the whole curriculum is organised to support it through transdisciplinary, concept-driven units.

Where inquiry lives

PYP inquiry is explored, experienced and framed through the transdisciplinary themes — broad lenses that connect learning across and beyond subjects. Within each theme, teachers and learners build *units of inquiry* from a central idea and lines of inquiry (§3), driven by the seven specified concepts.

Designing a Unit of Inquiry

- **Start from the central idea** — substantial, open-ended, neutral in voice.
- **Choose one or two specified concepts** to focus the inquiry, and let their driving questions shape the lines of inquiry.
- **Open with a provocation** (Play 1) and capture the questions on a Wonder Wall (Play 5).
- **Plan for agency** — design in places for voice, choice and ownership rather than scripting every step.
- **Lead with guided inquiry**, opening into learner-initiated inquiry as skills grow.
- **Expect action** — leave room for the responsible, self-chosen action a good unit provokes.

WORKED EXAMPLE · A UNIT OF INQUIRY

Transdisciplinary theme: Who we are.

Central idea: People's relationships have an impact on health and well-being.

Specified concepts: Function, Connection, Responsibility.

Lines of inquiry: the relationships in our lives · how relationships affect well-being · our role in healthy relationships.

Provocation: a wordless short film about a friendship — run See-Think-Wonder (Play 2).

Across the unit: Notice & Wonder to launch each line; Chalk Talk on “what makes a relationship healthy?”; journals for reflection.

Action: learners choose one small way to strengthen a relationship in their community.

The Exhibition

The PYP Exhibition is the programme's culminating, collaborative and student-led inquiry — it pulls together everything the plays have been building: questioning, investigation, collaboration, reflection and action. It involves substantial student leadership while still operating within programme structures and teacher support. Treat the whole playbook as preparation for it.

● PROGRESSIONS IN ACTION

The inquiry learning progressions (§7) were written with PYP learners in mind. Use them to document growth across a unit — a low-paperwork way to make the “portrait of an inquirer” visible to learners and families.

Plays that travel best here: Provocation Launch, See–Think–Wonder, Notice & Wonder, Wonder Wall, Chalk Talk, Exit Reflection.

C SECTION 11 • PROGRAMME BRANCH

Inquiry in the MYP

MYP inquiry is concept-driven and context-rich. It runs on a precise machinery — statements of inquiry, the three question types, and global contexts — that turns big ideas into investigable units.

The statement of inquiry

An MYP unit is anchored by a *statement of inquiry*: a sentence that fuses a **key concept** and **related concepts** with a **global context** to express a transferable understanding. It is the MYP's version of the central idea — the thing students come to understand, not merely to know.

Three questions that drive the unit

From the statement flow factual, conceptual and debatable questions (§3). Sequenced well, they march students from knowledge to understanding to judgement — and they map neatly onto the plays.

QUESTION TYPE	PLAY TO RUN IT WITH
Factual — build the knowledge floor	Notice & Wonder, Concept Attainment
Conceptual — reach for transfer	Claim-Support-Question, Connect-Extend-Challenge
Debatable — weigh positions	Tug-of-War, Socratic Circle

Global contexts

The six global contexts — identities and relationships; orientation in space and time; personal and cultural expression; scientific and technical innovation; globalisation and sustainability; fairness and development — are the lenses that make inquiry matter beyond the classroom. Pick the one that gives your concept real-world stakes.

WORKED EXAMPLE • AN MYP UNIT

Subject: Sciences. **Key concept:** systems. **Related concepts:** balance, consequences.

Global context: globalisation and sustainability.

Statement of inquiry: Human systems disturb natural balance, with consequences that cross borders.

Factual: What pollutes our local water? **Conceptual:** How do local actions ripple through a shared system? **Debatable:** Who is responsible for a problem that flows downstream?

Plays: launch with a Provocation (a photo of the local river); Claim-Support-Question on the data; close the debatable with a Socratic Circle.

Service as action: a student-designed proposal acted on locally.

Interdisciplinary inquiry & the Personal Project

Interdisciplinary units let a single concept be investigated through two subjects at once — fertile ground for Gallery Walk and Chalk Talk across class groups. The Personal Project is the MYP's open-inquiry capstone: a sustained, student-directed inquiry within defined objectives, supervision and assessment criteria — involving inquiry, action, the creation of a product or outcome, and reflection — that rewards every questioning and self-management skill the plays have built.

Plays that travel best here: QFT, Claim-Support-Question, Tug-of-War, Socratic Circle, Gallery Walk, Concept Attainment.

C SECTION 12 · PROGRAMME BRANCH

Inquiry in the DP

The DP is where teachers most fear inquiry can't survive — the content is heavy, the exams are real, the clock is loud. The honest answer: inquiry doesn't compete with rigour here, it delivers it. Understanding that transfers is exactly what high-stakes assessment rewards.

Keeping inquiry alive under exam pressure

- **Concept-based units** — organise content around the discipline's big ideas so students transfer understanding to unseen exam contexts rather than memorising cases.
- **Inquiry-led review** — replace some revision lectures with Socratic Circles on past-paper questions and Tug-of-War on contested interpretations.
- **Just-in-time teaching** — deliver dense content precisely when an inquiry creates the need for it.

Inquiry's natural homes in the DP

ELEMENT	INQUIRY MOVE
Theory of Knowledge	The purest inquiry in the DP — built on open <i>knowledge questions</i> . Socratic Circle is its native play.
Extended Essay	Open, student-directed inquiry, within subject and supervision requirements: a self-chosen research question pursued through disciplinary method. The capstone the continuum (\$2) has been building toward.
Internal Assessments	Many internal assessment components provide opportunities for guided or student-directed inquiry within subject-specific requirements.
Collaborative Sciences Project	Collaborative, cross-subject inquiry — Gallery Walk and Chalk Talk fit naturally (formerly the “Group 4 project”).

WORKED EXAMPLE · A DP REVIEW LESSON

Subject: History. **Debatable question:** To what extent were economic motives the main driver of the Cold War?

Run it as a Socratic Circle: inner circle argues from prepared evidence; outer circle tracks use of sources and counter-argument. Close with “I used to think... now I think...” (Exit Reflection).

Why it works: students rehearse exactly the evidence-weighting and perspective-handling the exam demands — through inquiry, not in spite of it.

Plays that travel best here: Socratic Circle, Tug-of-War, Claim-Support-Question, Connect-Extend-Challenge, QFT (for EE question-shaping).

C SECTION 13 · PROGRAMME BRANCH

Inquiry in the CP

The CP grounds inquiry in the real world of work and ethics. Here the driving questions are authentic and consequential — drawn from career contexts, workplace dilemmas, and the student's own professional becoming.

Where inquiry lives in the CP

ELEMENT	INQUIRY MOVE
The Reflective Project	The CP's open-inquiry centrepiece — a sustained investigation into an ethical dilemma arising from the student's career-related study.
Career-related study	Authentic workplace scenarios and case studies as provocations for guided inquiry.
Personal & Professional Skills	Metacognitive inquiry into the gap between theory and practice in real career contexts.
Community Engagement	Inquiry that issues directly in responsible action and reflection within the community (formerly “service learning”).
Language and Cultural Studies	Inquiry-led exploration of language and culture — questioning how language shapes identity and understanding (formerly “language development”).

• WORKED EXAMPLE · THE REFLECTIVE PROJECT

Field: business / marketing. **Debatable question:** What ethical responsibilities do marketers have when targeting products to children — and how should these differ across cultures?

Shape it with the plays: QFT to sharpen the question; Claim-Support-Question on real ad campaigns; Tug-of-War on “persuasion vs protection.”

Why it works: the dilemma is genuinely the student's, the stakes are real, and the inquiry ends in a reasoned ethical position they own.

Plays that travel best here: QFT, Tug-of-War, Claim-Support-Question, Socratic Circle, Gallery Walk.



PART THREE

From Playbook to Practice

How to start on Monday, the templates to photocopy, and how to grow inquiry from your room to your whole school.

IN THIS PART

14 Your First 30 Days

15 Templates

16 Building an Inquiry Culture

C SECTION 14 · FROM PLAYBOOK TO PRACTICE

Your First 30 Days

You do not adopt inquiry by reorganising your whole year. You adopt it one small, repeatable move at a time. Here is a four-week ramp from structured toward guided — low risk, high habit.

● ONE PLAY TO RUN TOMORROW

Pick Notice & Wonder (Play 3). It needs no preparation beyond one good prompt, fits in ten minutes, gives every student a way in, and immediately puts questions at the centre. That single play, run once, is a complete first step.

A four-week ramp

WEEK	FOCUS	DO THIS
1	Make space for questions	Run Notice & Wonder once. Start a Wonder Wall. Add five seconds of wait time after questions.
2	Open a lesson differently	Replace one explanation-led opening with a Provocation Launch or See-Think-Wonder.
3	Push for evidence	Use Claim-Support-Question on a source or data set. Bank a few talk-move stems (§4).
4	Hand over a question	Run a short QFT so students generate and prioritise their own questions; let one shape what comes next.

● THE ONLY RULE

Keep it sustainable. One new play a week, kept, beats ten plays tried once and abandoned. Inquiry is a dial you turn slowly — not a switch you flip.

SECTION 15 · FROM PLAYBOOK TO PRACTICE

Templates

Photocopiable, programme-neutral, deliberately spare. Make them yours.

Inquiry lesson planner — asking · thinking · doing

Driving question	
Concept & lens	
Continuum level	structured / guided / open
ASK — provocation / hook	
THINK — investigation & play(s)	
DO — reflection & possible action	
Just-in-time teaching	
Evidence I'll capture	

Cross-programme planning prompts

Not every field applies to every programme — each is tagged with the programme(s) it belongs to.

Central idea (PYP) / statement of inquiry (MYP)	
Specified concepts (PYP) / key & related concepts (MYP)	
Context — transdisciplinary theme (PYP) / global context (MYP) / disciplinary context (DP) / career-related context (CP)	
Lines of inquiry (PYP)	
Factual question(s)	
Conceptual question(s)	
Debatable question(s)	
Plays I'll use	
Action opportunity	

Portrait of an inquirer — progression tracker

PROGRESSION	WHERE THEY WERE	WHERE THEY ARE NOW	NEXT STEP
Questioning			
Observation			
Decision-making			
Role- & turn-taking			

Blank play-card — make your own

_____ • _____

LEVEL • BEST FOR _____

HOOK _____

TEACHER MOVES _____

STUDENT MOVES _____

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE _____

Timing _____ • Pairs with _____

Print several, fill them in when a routine works in your room, and add the best to your deck — the thirteen plays in \$5 are a starter set, not the whole game.

C SECTION 16 • FROM PLAYBOOK TO PRACTICE

Building an Inquiry Culture

One inquiring classroom is a gift to its students. A whole inquiring school is a different kind of education. The move from the first to the second is mostly about adults learning together.

Collaborative planning

The engine of a strong inquiry programme is regular, systematic planning among colleagues — grade teams, specialists, support staff — that still leaves deliberate space for learner questions and emergent inquiry. Plan the structure tightly so you can hold the content loosely.

Vertical alignment: PYP → MYP → DP or CP

Inquiry should feel like one continuous story across a student's years, not four unrelated dialects. Map how the continuum (§2) opens up over time: heavily guided in the early years, steadily more open, from the PYP Exhibition, to the MYP Personal Project, to either the Extended Essay (DP) or the Reflective Project (CP) — the DP and CP being parallel pathways for ages 16–19, not consecutive stages. Shared language — concepts, the three question types, the asking–thinking–doing loop — is what makes the alignment real.

Peer coaching for inquiry

- **Play swaps** — colleagues try the same play in different subjects, then compare what happened.
- **Question-focused observation** — observe one another for a single thing: who is generating the questions?
- **Lesson study** — plan one inquiry lesson together, watch it, and refine it as a team.
- **Portraits, shared** — bring progression evidence (§7) to team meetings to calibrate what growth looks like.

• START WHERE THE PARENT BOOK ENDS

Approaches to Teaching in Action closes by urging schools to weave the approaches into professional development and peer coaching. This playbook is a ready vehicle for that: pick one play a month as a whole-staff focus, and build the culture one shared move at a time.

BACK MATTER

Glossary, sources & index

Glossary of inquiry terms

Asking–thinking–doing	The IB’s framing (drawn particularly from PYP guidance) of the inquiry process as the looping interplay of inquiry, reflection and action.
Central idea	A substantial, open-ended statement that anchors a PYP unit of inquiry.
Continuum (structured–guided–open)	The range of inquiry from teacher-set to student-set question and method.
Global context	An MYP lens connecting a concept to real-world significance.
Lines of inquiry	The avenues students travel to build a central understanding.
Mechanized convergence	The narrowing of ideas when learners lean on AI before their own thinking.
Provocation	A stimulus designed to spark curiosity and productive tension.
Specified concepts	The seven PYP concepts (form, function, causation, change, connection, perspective, responsibility).
Statement of inquiry	The MYP sentence fusing concepts and a global context into a transferable understanding.
Voice, choice, ownership	The three components of learner agency, as articulated particularly in PYP guidance.

Source map

SECTION	PRINCIPAL SOURCE
§1–§4, §6 (spirit, continuum, concepts, role, reflection/action)	Learning and teaching (PYP)
§7 (assessing & documenting)	Inquiry learning progressions: Introduction
§8 (inquiry in the age of AI)	Using AI in inquiry
Throughout (cross-references)	Approaches to Teaching in Action

Master index of plays

#	PLAY	LEVEL	BEST FOR
1	Provocation Launch	Structured–Guided	Launching a unit
2	See–Think–Wonder	Structured	Observation
3	Notice & Wonder	Structured	Generating questions
4	Question Formulation Technique	Guided	Student-owned questions
5	Wonder Wall	Ongoing	Curating curiosity
6	Claim–Support–Question	Guided	Reasoning with evidence
7	Connect–Extend–Challenge	Structured	Synthesis & reflection
8	Chalk Talk	Guided	Surfacing every voice
9	Socratic Circle	Guided–Open	Dialogic reasoning
10	Tug-of-War	Guided	Exploring tensions
11	Gallery Walk	Guided	Peer cross-pollination
12	Concept Attainment	Structured	Building a concept
13	Exit Reflection	Structured	Closing the loop

Principal sources & rights

Full publication details (year and edition) for the IB sources should be confirmed against the current published documents before formal citation.

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The Inquiry Playbook · a companion to *Approaches to Teaching in Action* · Dr. Maged Abdallah. This edition paraphrases and builds on guidance published by the IB for classroom use; it is an independent professional resource and is not an official IB publication. International Baccalaureate, Baccalauréat International, Bachillerato Internacional and IB are registered trademarks of the International Baccalaureate Organization.