

## Handout 1.2: Challenge cards

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*Challenge cards* are another simple idea. Most teachers will have had the experience of finding a gem of a question which forces students to reconsider either what they believe to be true or that they have finished their work. It has the ability to stop them in their tracks and make them reconsider. This cognitive conflict, or cognitive dissonance, is a valuable tool in increasing challenge during a lesson (read more about cognitive conflict in CUREE's Month 3 paper: *Securing effective levels of challenge*). *Challenge cards* are simply a way of formalising and planning for these questions. Like a planned extension task it allows the teacher to extend or deepen the thinking of individual students but they are less time consuming to prepare and can be used more responsively during a lesson to promote different rates of progress. Classroom observations are showing that students find *Challenge cards* engaging and motivating (you might like to read more about one teacher's views of *Challenge cards* in Wendy Cooper's month 3 journal entry).

The idea for *Challenge cards* was sewn a number of years ago. As a young Geography teacher I was teaching a Year 9 lesson on the distribution of earthquakes and volcanoes. The more able quickly established that most were located along plate margins and could explain the tectonic processes which accounted for this. After speedily completing the task I asked one boy how, if Edinburgh Castle is built on an extinct volcano and Edinburgh is in the centre of a plate, can this be true? His satisfaction at completing the requested task almost visibly evaporated and all of sudden I had a student who was wrestling with a complex problem which required a much deeper level of understanding to solve; he was being challenged and he loved it!

**Reminder:** A *Challenge card* isn't just an extension task – something else to do. It is a new piece of information or question which causes a learner to reconsider their current knowledge or understanding.

### What to do

Teachers who have been trialling *Challenge cards* find it helpful to have just one or two to try out towards the end of a task in their classroom first. Later, individual teachers plan more cards for personal use before sharing them with colleagues. In the two trial schools their use has spread - first departmentally and then whole school.

You will probably need more than one copy of your *Challenge cards* in case a few students need one. You might also find it helpful to have different *Challenge cards* on different coloured paper so that you can manage more efficiently which cards students need.

As you monitor learning during the course of the lesson (this demands you step back and watch learners at work) discreetly pass a learner or a group one of the cards and ask them to consider it. You might then choose not to include them in a whole class plenary but instead debrief them separately or via a homework task.

You may like to try picture cards with weak readers. Sometimes weak readers have high cognitive function and require more challenge than they are often given.

## Exemplar Challenge Cards

KS1/2 Topic	Y5/6 World Religions	KS2 Weather, Geography	KS2/3 Rainforests
If water puts out fires how did the Great Fire of Newcastle spread from the Gateshead side of the river to the Newcastle side?	If Hinduism is the oldest world religion why has it not spread across the globe like Christianity has?	If it's hottest at the equator why is there snow on Kilimanjaro?	If rainforests are home to so much vegetation and so much variety the soil must be really fertile. Yes?
KS3 Hazards, Geography	KS3 Rivers, Geography	KS3 Science	KS4 RE
Edinburgh Castle sits on an extinct volcano. Edinburgh is in the middle of a plate. How can this be?	So do rivers get faster downstream?	Why do you think that placing two electrodes of different metals into a frog's leg causes it to move?	Why, if religions are generally against war and violence, is there such a thing as a 'holy war'?

## KS5 Philosophy &amp; Ethics

Self-harm is painful.  
If utilitarians value  
pleasure over pain  
how can they justify  
this behaviour?

## KS4 PE

Why is it that most  
people who are good  
at tennis struggle  
when it comes to  
badminton, which  
after all is another  
racquet sport?

Please send your favourite *Challenge Cards* to  
[www.leadinglearning.eu/differentiation](http://www.leadinglearning.eu/differentiation) and  
tell us what impact they had in the classroom.