

Once you have an essential question, there are some things to remember when teaching a unit with an EQ at its center (see Box 5.2).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN TEACHING UNITS WITH ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- **The essential characteristic of essential questions is that they're debatable**, but genuinely debatable questions are very rare in schools. Introduce your unit with an activity that demonstrates the disagreement that exists around a question.
- **If students are responding to debatable questions, then they'll have to make a case** to persuade those who don't share their views. Help them to do so by probing for evidence (e.g., What makes you say so?) and for explanations of how the evidence relates to and supports the claim (e.g., So what?)
- **Units built around EQs put texts in conversation with each other.** So make it a routine to ask questions like these: Of the authors we've read, who would most strongly agree with this author? Who would most strongly disagree? Or return to your frontloading surveys and rankings and ask how authors or characters from different texts would respond.
- **Put literary and nonliterary texts into conversation.**
- **Select a focal reading skill** called for in the CCSS that the texts you choose invite readers to apply.
- **Give students the chance to engage in academic writing and in some other kind of meaningful making.**

Box 5.2

Figure 5.5 presents a planning sheet that we've found useful in creating the kind of units we're suggesting.

Planning Your Own Unit

Let's quickly walk through the kind of thinking you might do with another unit. Say that you teach eighth grade and your colleagues in science begin their course with a unit on heredity. One great way to make connections across disciplines would be to develop a unit around this EQ:

What makes me who I am?