

From Issue to question to action

The Big Issue

Begin your journey to identifying a specific, achievable issue to address by first looking at the Big Issue and all of the possible reasons for it.

Using a simple web or similar graphic, students can look at a rather large issue (like homelessness) and identify many different reasons why that issue exists. Once students have gone through this process, they can then focus on ONE of these reasons in the 5-whys process.

Note: It is important at this level to only brainstorm the first level of reasons related to an issue: For example, if homelessness is your Big Issue, one reason students may give is “because people don’t have jobs.” Do not explore this reason further (they’ll do this at the 5-whys stage), simply move to another larger reason for homelessness.

Step-by-step instructions

1. Start with a Big Issue. This could be something identified through current events or controversial topics, but should be something identified by students, or in collaboration with the teacher.
2. Placing the Big Issue in the middle of the web, have students brainstorm all of the possible reasons why that issue exists. At this point, list everything students come up with. Don’t be afraid to include your reasons as well.
3. Once a variety of reasons have been identified, begin the process of combining or categorizing them.
4. Next, work with students to prioritize these reasons along the following lines: the most likely cause, most actionable, etc.
5. If having the whole class address various aspects of the Big Issue, have groups take one of the prioritized reasons and move to the 5-whys process. Otherwise, take the top reason identified and begin the 5-whys process.

5-Whys Process

The 5-Whys is a simple brainstorming tool that can help teams identify the root cause(s) of a problem. Once a general problem has been recognized, ask “why” questions to drill down to the root causes. Asking the 5-Whys allows teams to move beyond obvious answers and reflect on less obvious explanations or causes.

The 5-Whys is a strategy that is often used after an issue has been identified using another tool, such as a Fishbone Diagram or Process Mapping. Don’t use the 5-Whys process without first identifying many possible reasons related to your Big Issue.

Step-by-step instructions

1. Start with one of the reasons you’ve identified related to your Big Issue
2. For each level, answer the question, “Why is this so?” Make sure that your answer is specifically related to the level above.
3. Ask as many whys question until you get to a level that is either You will know you have reached your final ‘why’ because it either does not make logical sense to ask why again, or the next reason is something that you cannot feasibly affect.
4. When you’ve reached your last “why” and can go no further, highlight it. **THIS IS YOUR MOST ACTIONABLE REASON/ISSUE TO ADDRESS, your ACTION POINT.**

From Issue to question to action

Planning for Change

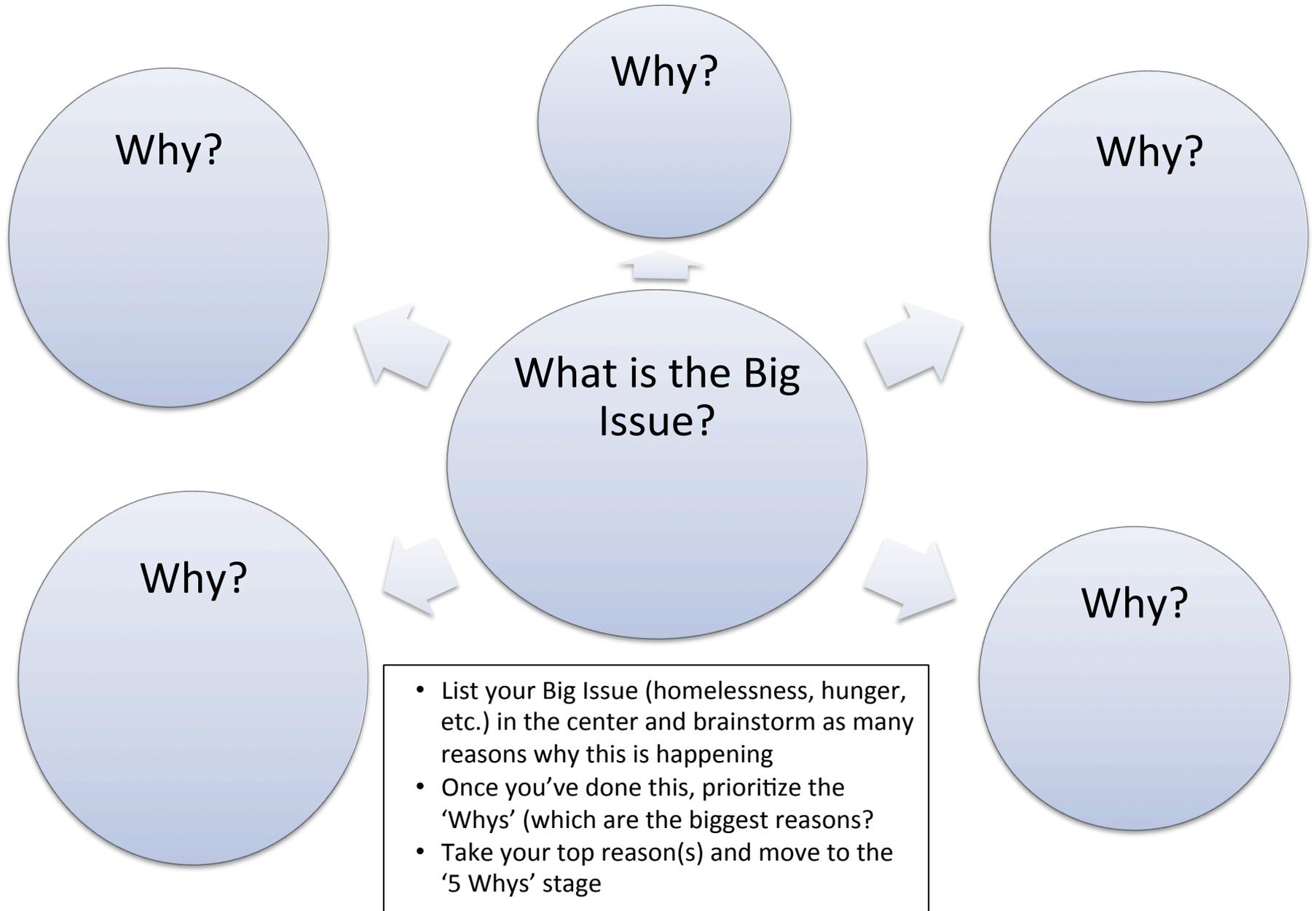
Having identified reasons for the Big Issue and narrowed one reason down to an Action Point, Planning for Change is the point where students determine their best course of action to address their Big Issue. Through this process students will:

- Research all aspects of their identified Action Point;
- Look at how other individuals have tried to address the issue in the past, learning from their missteps or successes;
- Identify possible supports and opposition to their efforts; and
- Determine a real, tangible outcome for their efforts.

With this outcome in mind, students will then be able to determine strategies they can use to address their Big Issue.

There are no **Step-by-step instructions** for this guide, rather have students use the questions to guide their further research and planning.

Getting to the core of an issue: A brainstorm guide



Digging deeper into a reason: The 5-whys Process

What's the Issue?:

Why is this happening?

Because

Digging Deeper...

Because

Because

Because

- If you come to a reason that you cannot readily affect, highlight the previous reason- This is your Action Point.
- Your reason should not be a person; Look beyond the person and focus on what they're doing.

Our Action Point. If we can affect this, then we will address the bigger issue:

- You're not listing 5 *different reasons*, but digging deeper into one.
- Base your reasons on research, not just what you *think*.
- You may not need to ask 5 whys to get to your Action Point.

From Question to Action: Planning for Change

Our Big Issue:

Our Action Point. The reason (from the 5 Whys process) that we're going to address in order to address the Big Issue:

Research:

- What more do we need to know about our Action Point?
- How will we get that information?

Strategy:

- Have other people or groups tried to address this? If so, how?
- Were their efforts successful? Why or why not?
- What can we learn from their efforts?

Initial thoughts:

Which strategies might be effective in bringing about change?
Are they policy or service strategies?

Power Analysis:

- Who are the decision makers or decision influencers?

Support

- Who might be a supporter of our efforts? Why?
- How can we get them to support us?

Opposition:

- Who might oppose our efforts? Why?
- What can we do to win their support?
- If we can't win their support, how can we address their arguments?

Our Ask:

What *specifically* do we want?
