

Hypothetical Question

Definition of Hypothetical Question

A hypothetical question is based on supposition, opinion, personal belief, or conjecture, and not facts. It is not based on reality. It mostly deals with actions and scenarios that might happen, or something that might not have happened as yet, but which could happen. This sort of a question usually requires the questioner to arrange imaginary parameters for the things he supposes.

Common Use of Hypothetical Question

What would you do if you are given 24 hours to live?

If you were a robot, what would you want to do?

If you are offered 3 wishes, what would they be?

Difference between Hypothetical and Rhetorical Question

The difference between hypothetical and rhetorical questions is that a [rhetorical question](#) presupposes a correct answer, of which readers are aware. However, a hypothetical question poses an imagined and assumption-based question, not based in fact, and hence the answer could be different from what readers expect.

Examples of Hypothetical Question in Literature

Example #1: *A Modest Proposal* (By Jonathan Swift)

“The number of souls in this kingdom being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couple whose wives are breeders; from which number I subtract thirty thousand couple, who are able to maintain their own children... There only remain an hundred and

twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born: The question therefore is, How this number shall be reared, and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present Situation of Affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed ...”

In this passage, Swift is estimating the number of people, and THE number of couples who can manage their children. Then he asks a hypothetical question based on his own opinions and assumption.

Example #2: *Hamlet* (By William Shakespeare)

CLAUDIUS: And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit. What is 't, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane
And lose your [voice](#). What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?
The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.
What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

Here, Claudius asks Laertes what favor he wants from him. Claudius hypothetically asks Laertes how he can waste time of his king by asking something he cannot give him.

Example #3: *Dr. Faustus* (By Christopher Marlowe)

FAUSTUS: My heart is harden'd, I cannot repent...
Have not I made blind Homer sing to me
Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
Made music with my Mephistophilis?
Why should I die, then, or basely despair?

Speak, are there many spheres above the moon?
Are all celestial bodies but one globe,
As is the substance of this centric earth?

In these lines, Faustus is posing hypothetical questions from two angles. First, he tries to convince himself that he has not done any wrong, and second that various others have done the same thing earlier. Therefore, he is not different.

Example #4: *Waiting for Godot* (By Samuel Beckett)

ESTRAGON: (very insidious). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (Pause.) Or Monday? (Pause.) Or Friday?

VLADIMIR:
(looking wildly about him, as though the date was inscribed in the landscape). It's not possible!

ESTRAGON:
Or Thursday?

VLADIMIR:
What'll we do?

ESTRAGON:
If he came yesterday and we weren't here you may be sure he won't come again today.

VLADIMIR:
But you say we were here yesterday.

In this example, Estragon and Vladimir pose questions to one another, which are based merely on assumptions. Both are asking and giving generalized answers without knowing the facts or truths.

Function of Hypothetical Question

Hypothetical question is frequently used in literature, communication, job

assumed answers and supposed point of views of the writer or [speaker](#), and to give his own opinion. In public speeches, speakers might have some hidden motives for such questions. The major function of a hypothetical question is to elicit opinions from readers.