

Layers

A routine for analytically examining creative works through various frameworks.

Each layer consists of 4 possible elements to identify and examine in a creative work.

- **Narrative** The story, the back story, the hidden story, the message
- **Aesthetic** The appeal, the reward, the skill/mastery, the new/different/unusual
- **Mechanical** Technique, form, structure, methods
- **Dynamic** Surprise, tension, emotion, movement
- **Connections** To other works (in and out of the medium/genre), to history, to oneself, to the artist's other works or personal life

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

The routine provides learners with a structure for looking analytically at creative works through a variety of different “layers” or frameworks.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

Through using this routine, students learn that the process of analysis involves identifying many parts - or “layers” - of a creative work (e.g. literature, dance, painting, etc.). In this routine, students select the layer that they want to analyze. Some layers may be more familiar to students than others. Selecting unfamiliar layers may help students expand and deepen their understanding of the work.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

This routine works best after students have had the opportunity to look closely at a creative work and to fully notice what is there. Students can then select a layer from the list to use in their analysis. This analysis can be done individually, with a partner, or in a whole group. Initially you may want to introduce one layer at a time with the whole class so that students have some collective experience using the layers. The analysis might be done verbally so that students hear and can build on others' ideas and contributions.

Here are some examples for how you can use this routine:

- **To identify prominent and hidden qualities.** Ask students, What layer immediately speaks to you? What makes you say that? Which layers seem more distant? What makes you say that?
- **To compare and contrast.** Ask students to contrast two works to see how they relate to one another: Where do you see connections as well as differences in terms of the layers?
- **To consider an individual element from one or more of the layers.** Ask students to pick one of the four elements from one or more of the five layers to explore the work.
- **To develop questions.** Ask students to use the layers and their elements to develop questions they want to ask an expert about the work of art.

This thinking routine was developed as part of the Cultures of Thinking project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.