

Facilitator Notes

Art to Systems and Back

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This thinking arc can take anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour, depending on how the experience is structured. Because the arc is a little longer than a regular thinking routine, you might consider dividing up the experience across a few class periods. However, it can also be powerful to complete the arc during one session. Envision how the lesson will unfold and do what makes the most sense based on your students and your curriculum.

Thinking about civic systems provides students with an opportunity to wrestle with complex ideas about civic life. Below are some notes to help you think about how to best support students through this process.

The idea of civically-related systems

The idea of civically-related systems is a big concept with fuzzy boundaries and it can be challenging to grasp. The idea behind the idea is that there are forces that shape the way people think and act as members of a community. These forces can include rules, beliefs, customs, and conventions. Governmental procedures at all levels are systems, but so are holiday customs, and school lunch lines. Even the process of you reading this text as a way of getting information can be considered a civic system, because it's part of the way you share knowledge with a community—in this case, your community of student learners. Students don't need to have a precise understanding of civically related systems. Instead, what's important is that they begin to see how systems are part of how people perceive and interact with one another.

To get a sense of how different learners and facilitators do this step of the thinking arc, take a look at the pictures of practice associated with the arc. These two contrasting examples – one [a conversation between adult colleagues over Zoom](#), the other [an experience with high school students in a museum](#) – illustrate how this arc can work in a variety of settings. It also works with different types of artwork – from the very abstract to the very realistic.

FACILITATING THE ARC

Identifying parts of a system

This step can be approached in a variety of ways. You can begin with a whole group discussion or give participants a few minutes to work independently and/or in pairs before sharing their ideas. Identifying parts isn't an exact science: Sometimes parts can be easy to identify—like the different steps involved in waiting in a school lunch line. Sometimes they can be more difficult to see—like the beliefs about human behavior and values that underlie a set of rules. Encourage students to consider obvious and not-so-obvious parts, and not to worry if the parts seem to overlap. The purpose of this step is to help students expand their 'systems lens' by exploring the parts that make systems work. Again, take a look at the pictures of practice associated with this thinking arc to get a sense of how different learners and facilitators handle it.

Discussing personal connections to a system (an optional step of the thinking arc)

Personal connection-making can lead to powerful and memorable learning. However, this step takes some time to do it thoughtfully, and, depending on the system under discussion, students' responses can be quite personal. If you do this step, be sure to give the step the time it needs and do what's necessary to make students feel safe and comfortable. For instance, consider allowing people to take a minute or two to silently reflect on what they might feel comfortable sharing. It may also be useful to create or revisit norms for respectful dialogue. See the ArtC Dialogues Moves resource for suggestions.