

Creative Question Starts

A routine to practice developing questions that provoke thinking and inquiry.

1. **Brainstorm** at least 12 questions about the topic, concept, artwork or object. Try some of the Creative Starts Questions.
2. **Review** your list, identify the most interesting questions, and select one to discuss.
3. **Reflect:** What new ideas do you have about the topic, concept, artwork, or object that you didn't have before?

Creative Question Starts:

- What colors do you see?
- Why...?
- What if...?
- What is the purpose of...?
- How would it be different if...?
- Suppose that...?
- What if we knew...?
- What would change if...?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine provides practice developing questions that provoke thinking and inquiry. Brainstorming such questions helps students explore the complexity, depth, and multi-dimensionality of a topic.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

Use this routine to expand and deepen students' thinking, to encourage their curiosity, and to increase their motivation to inquire. This routine works well throughout the study of a topic in a variety of ways: when introducing a new topic to help students get a sense of the topic's breadth; in the middle of studying a topic as a way to enliven students' curiosity; and, finally, near the end of studying a topic as a way of showing students how the knowledge they have gained helps them to ask more complex questions.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

To begin, you might want to ask students what they think makes a good question. Then, when you introduce the routine, you can connect to their ideas about what makes good questions and explain that the routine is a tool for asking good questions that lead to greater insight. Initially, it may work best to do the routine together as an entire group. Once students are familiar with the routine, you can have them work in small groups or even solo.

In your planning, think about how you would like your students to engage at each step. For example, the students might do step 1 as a whole group, step 2 in pairs, and return to the whole group discussion in step 3.

Start the routine by providing a topic, concept, piece of artwork, or object. Ask them to use the Creative Question Starts to generate a list of questions about the topic. Creating the list is worthwhile since it gives students a sense of the breadth of a topic and sparks curiosity about it. Exploring the questions further can pique students' interest and can fluidly expand the discussion of the topic.

After the students finish generating questions, you may want to select one of the questions to investigate further, have a discussion about some of the questions, give students information to read about the topic, or explore some of the questions by imaginatively playing out possibilities. Additional ways students could explore or investigate their questions (and the topic) include writing a story or essay, drawing a picture, creating a play or dialogue, inventing a scenario, conducting an imaginary interview, or conducting a thought experiment.

The reflection step is an important component of the routine since it allows students to identify new insights and ideas about the topic, object, artwork, or concept. Consider documenting students' questions throughout their study of the topic and display the list in a visible place so that students can see how their questions about the topic evolve. If students are working individually with the routine, they could write their question lists in a journal. You also could create a collage out of students' individual lists and put it on display.

This thinking routine was developed as part of the Visible 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.