

Parts, People, Interactions (For Younger Children)



Parts

Choose a system and ask:

What are the parts? What do they do?

People

Who are the people? What do they do?

Interactions

How do the parts and people work together?
What would happen if a part (or a person)
were missing or changed?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine encourages learners to slow down and look closely at a system. It helps them notice that there are different people who participate in the system and that they participate in different ways. It also encourages students to explore how one change in a system can impact the rest of the system. This thinking routine can help foster curiosity as children notice details, ask questions, make connections, and identify topics for future inquiry. It also helps children practice systems thinking.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

You can use this thinking routine to explore any system. You may choose to introduce the entire routine at once, or you may choose to break it down into parts over multiple occasions.

- If you are using this thinking routine with young learners, consider having them explore a system they have direct experience with. This way, all children can apply and build upon their prior knowledge in meaningful ways. We suggest you start with systems in your classroom or community that students use regularly.
- Systems are made up of subsystems, and are themselves parts of broader systems. In order to avoid going down the rabbit hole of “everything is connected to everything,” it may be helpful for you to encourage your students to define the boundaries of their system.
- This routine provides an opportunity for children to make their thinking visible. Children can show their thinking through drawings, visual mapping, photos, role play, and/or writing.
- You may realize, as you engage with this thinking routine, that the system you have selected is more complicated or abstract than you originally thought. This is okay. Help students look closely at the parts that they are interested in, and feel free to help them seek more information by asking each other, by using books or the internet, or by consulting with community members. It is okay if students have unanswered questions about the system. Consider documenting these questions to revisit if the opportunity presents itself later on. Note: This thinking routine is adapted from the Agency by Design Parts, People, Interactions thinking routine.

FACILITATION

This activity is recommended for the following learner age ranges:

- Preschool
 - 15-30 minutes
 - Heavily facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver
- Elementary School
 - 15-30 minutes
 - Lightly facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver

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