

People, Systems, Power, Participation

A THINKING ROUTINE FOR LOOKING CRITICALLY AT CONTENT AND DEVELOPING
A SENSITIVITY TO THE ROLE(S) OF POWER AND PARTICIPATION
IN THE DESIGN OF OBJECTS AND SYSTEMS.

Begin by looking closely at a piece of content or a collection of content—e.g. text(s), image(s), etc.

Notice

- Name everything you see.
- Note the context—when and where are things happening?
- Note evidence of relevant social issues.
- What questions do you have?
- What messages are you seeing?

People

- Who is involved?
- Whose perspectives are being represented? Whose voices are the loudest? How do you know?
- Whose perspectives are *not* being represented? Whose voices are the quietest—perhaps even silenced?

Systems

- Name the systems that are involved.
- Name any systems that are challenged by the message(s) in the content.
- Note any connections you see between the people and the systems.

Power

- What systems have power?
- What people have power?
- What *kinds* of power do you see?

Participation

- How do you participate in any social issues that have surfaced? How do you participate in any systems you have noted/discussed?
- What power(s) do you have to influence or change the systems?
- How might you participate differently within the systems? Outside of the systems?

This thinking routine invites young people to engage with complex concepts **like systems** and **power**. Scaffolds to support learners to explore the complexity of these concepts are included. Spend time with each step of the protocol—looking closely, exploring complexity, and finding opportunity.

Notice

Encourage students to share in depth reflections about the content early on—to name what they *think* they are seeing and what questions they have. This will likely require some steps to understand the context of the content, including doing some research. Ask: Who made this? What do you know about the maker? When and where was it made? What do you know about that place and time?

People

During this step, it may be helpful to reference the AbD protocol [Voice and Choice](#). Most importantly, ask whose perspectives are represented and whose are missing.

Systems

There are systems of government, transportation, language, architecture, communication, media, family, religion, immigration, the economy, manufacturing, land use, oppression—racism, ableism, xenophobia, heterosexism, classism—and others. One way to support learners to develop their understanding of systems is through the routine use of AbD tools such as [Parts, Purposes, Complexities](#) and [Parts, People, Interactions](#), which encourage looking closely and exploring the complexity of systems. Regularly use these routines to develop students' sensitivity to the designs of systems.

Power

Types of power ([Read more](#) about the types of power and explore ideas for teaching about power.)

- **Power over**—being coercive, repressive, corrupt, etc., e.g. the government might have **power over** the people
- **Power to**—doing something to shape or change your world e.g. a person might have **power to** sign a petition or volunteer their time
- **Power with**—finding common ground, building collective strength e.g. people might find **power** collaborating **with** one another on a project or initiative
- **Power within**—being able to imagine or feel hope; having personal resolve e.g. people may find **power within** to be brave, creative, resilient, confident, etc.

Some additional activities for exploring the complexity of Power*:

- Making a 3D representation of your definition of power
- Drawing what a powerful person looks like
- Mapping or drawing your power(s): individual, family, community, school, etc.
- Looking for evidence of the different types of power—in person, in texts and in visuals

Participation

While it is suggested that all preceding steps of the protocol be completed in small groups, the *Participation* step is meant to be self-reflective—at least initially. Invite students to consider the prompts individually before sharing their reflections with group.

*JusticexDesign thanks educator Agnes Gómez for piloting and sharing suggested scaffolds for teaching about power.