

What Can Be

A routine for considering how complexities unfold.

Choose something (there are endless possibilities, from objects to systems, human-made or natural, ideas or issues, people and societies or narratives) that affect us and has changed in many ways.

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| Review | How did it get to be the way it is now? Who/what might have caused or influenced these changes? |
| Predict | How else might this change in the future? |
| Imagine and Create | Change always comes with challenges. If you could turn the challenges of these predicted changes into opportunities, what do you imagine could be? What could be created? |

Consider how things that have been the same or similar for a long time are changing rapidly in our complex world and despite the unknown, how might we plan to positively shape changes ahead?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

The only constant in our complex world is change. Change can elicit uncertainty and fear, yet change can also provide new opportunities. This routine is designed to encourage exploration of possibilities and to build agency in imagining and creating how things could change and what can be.

Application: When and where can I use it?

Objects and situations can be accepted as is, status quo. But how else could they be? The “What Can Be” routine is designed to encourage the freedom to imagine possibilities. The creative process can involve solving a problem, creating an alternative, making something new or an exploration of options. These learning opportunities can include using found or available materials that could be discarded, and/or specifically selected materials, and time given for imagining how else they could be, to dream, plan and design. New or adapted objects and/or systems can be created individually, in groups or as whole class activities.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

- The Review step (seeking to identify how today’s objects, ideas, systems and narratives came about in the first place, and what caused changes along the way) can help develop understanding of why beliefs that have been held and objects created have changed. This in turn reveals how they might be developed further or new creations built on what has been learned from past experiences. Why are schools in so many ways the same as when our grandparents were at school? What changes could be made in schools for a better fit for growing up in our changing world?
- Students may need to be encouraged to take risks with this thinking routine experience. History provides many examples of people trying something differently and persevering when things went awry. A fun and engaging way to encourage students to think about what can be could be to look at accidental discoveries
- *How can predictions be made when so much is unknown?* The word “predictions” encourages safe risk taking. It is not expressing certainty of what will be, rather forecasts, likelihoods and projections, and therefore worth exploring what could happen with the aim of providing positive options ahead, or, if predictions are not so positive, giving time to seek alternative ways ahead.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags #PZThinkingRoutines and #WhatCanBe.



This thinking routine was developed by Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education as part of the PZ Connect project with generous support from Independent Schools Victoria (AU).

Explore more Thinking Routines at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines