Artful Thinking: Think/Puzzle/Explore

The Artful Thinking approach encourages active looking and learning through the practice of short, simple thinking routines. These routines help students focus on specific aspects of an artwork and organize their observations and ideas. The repetition of thinking routines across subjects and disciplines supports students in developing not only the skills for inquiry, but also the habits of an inquiring mind.

This lesson features a routine that supports students in historical thinking. Formulating compelling questions for investigation is essential to historical inquiry. Artists who have been eyewitnesses to history often interpret their experiences through metaphorical, ambiguous, and multi-layered images. This naturally encourages students to wonder, question, and make powerful connections. Think/Puzzle/Explore is a routine that prepares students for deeper inquiry. It provides a framework for assessing prior knowledge and turns students’ innate curiosity about artwork into compelling questions and authentic motivation for learning.

Grade Level
Grades 8–12

Common Core Academic State Standards
• CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1
• CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6
• CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9

National Visual Arts Standards
• Responding: understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning
• Connecting: relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context

C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards
• Dimension 1: Constructing Compelling Questions
• Dimension 2: History – Perspectives

Suggested Art Images
Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Museum’s website:
• Mr. Prejudice, 1943, Horace Pippin
• Training for War, c. 1942, William Henry Johnson

Mr. Prejudice, 1943
Horace Pippin (American)
Oil on canvas
18 1/8 x 14 1/8 inches (46 x 35.9 cm)
Framed: 23 11/16 x 19 11/16 x 3 1/8 inches (60.2 x 50 x 7.9 cm)
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Matthew T. Moore, 1984
1984-108-1
Lesson Objectives
Students will be able to:

• Respond to works of art with interpretations, questions, and connections.
• Formulate compelling questions for historical inquiry.
• Recognize and reflect on historical questions from multiple viewpoints.

Materials Needed
• Screen for projecting images
• Whiteboard or chart paper for recording
• Copies of *Mr. Prejudice* (optional)
• Think/Puzzle/Explore worksheets
• Document Reflection worksheets
• Photocopies of selected Supplementary Materials (make enough sets of the readings so that small groups of three or four can each have one set)

Lesson Process
1. Before beginning this lesson, read the Teacher Resource for *Mr. Prejudice* and review *What are Compelling Questions* on the C3 Teachers website.

2. Gather and preview all the Supplementary Materials for Student Investigation. The suggested artworks are best contextualized within a study of civil rights or American involvement in World Wars I and II, but background knowledge is not a requirement. You will be able to assess students’ prior knowledge through the Think/Puzzle/Explore activity.

3. Project an image of *Training for War* for students to see. Explain that they will be looking closely at works of art and considering what they might be about. They will make connections to their prior knowledge and experiences, and formulate questions they want to investigate further.

4. Give students a few minutes to look at the painting. Ask them to share their initial observations, and list these on chart paper or the white board. Encourage students to describe only what they can see using prompts such as “I see,” “I notice,” and “there is.”

5. Create your own large Think/Puzzle/Explore chart on paper or the board so that you can record students’ thoughts and questions. Ask them what they think about this artwork. What is it about? What story is it telling? What do they think they already know about this time period or topic? Record responses in the Think column.

6. Although students may have some misconceptions about *Training for War*, accept and record all responses so that they are available for investigation. Do not tell students that they are right or wrong, but ask what they see that draws them to their conclusions.
7. Now ask students to share any questions, or puzzles, that they have. What is confusing? What needs to be clarified? What do they wonder about? Write their questions in the Puzzle column of your chart. Some questions may be simplistic and easily answered, but encourage students to think about things in the painting that are truly puzzling to them.

8. Ask students if there are any observations, thoughts, or questions about Training for War they want to explore further. For now, have them circle thoughts and questions for investigation on their Think/Puzzle/Explore worksheets. Record some of these ideas in the Explore column of your chart. Are there any common themes that stand out?

9. Introduce the idea of a compelling question to your students. A compelling question for inquiry must be both intellectually challenging and address a real issue that students genuinely care about. A truly compelling question can spark debate about enduring, thorny historical conflicts and motivate students to seek out relevant information.

10. Do any of the class questions about Training for War seem like compelling questions? Could any of the ideas for exploration be a compelling question? What kind of information do students think they would need to start answering those questions?

11. Divide students into small groups of three or four. Distribute the Think/Puzzle/Explore worksheets, and project an image of Mr. Prejudice. You might also hand out copies of the image to groups or to individuals.

12. Tell students that they are going to work in their groups to complete the same Think/Puzzle/Explore exercise for this new image. Provide a few minutes for the whole class to look closely and describe what they see. When their observations turn to thoughts and questions, ask them to continue the discussion in their small groups. Circulate and provide support as necessary.

13. Once all groups have completed the Think and Puzzle columns of their worksheets, call the class back together. Ask each group to choose one thought and one question to share. What big ideas or compelling questions arise from Mr. Prejudice? What do students want to explore further? What kind of information do they think they might need?

14. Both Training for War and Mr. Prejudice can inspire questions about segregation and racism in the military and civil society. Students might wonder about the meaning and value of military service, patriotism in a segregated society, how different groups are affected by discriminatory policies, or the processes by which social change occurs. If students have a hard time articulating questions that are worthy of investigation, you can guide the discussion in any of those directions.

15. At the culmination of the Think/Puzzle/Explore activity, you should have two or three compelling questions from which small groups can choose. Ask each group to decide on one question for further exploration. Distribute a set of Supplementary Materials to each small group. The materials can also be accessed digitally, if you have the necessary technology in your classroom.

16. Hand out the Document Reflection worksheets. Each member of a small group will read and analyze a different document from the Supplementary Materials. Share with students that the documents help to tell the story of Training for War and Mr. Prejudice from multiple perspectives. Make sure students understand the Document Reflection prompts, and allow them ample time for reading and writing. Circulate and provide support as needed.
Reflection and Assessment

1. Ask students to share in their small groups, summarizing each document and its connection to their inquiry. What viewpoint does the document represent? How would they respond to the compelling question from this viewpoint? How do they see the artwork from this viewpoint? What new questions do they have?

2. Open the discussion up to the whole class. Invite students to read their reflections. What perspectives are represented? If any of them express conflicting viewpoints, why might that be? Do the documents change the way they see the artwork? If so, how?

3. Finally, return to the compelling questions you developed together. Ask students to reflect on how formulating questions for inquiry shaped the way they viewed the artwork and primary sources.

Suggested Differentiation

- Students who have less experience with historical inquiry may need you to formulate a compelling question for them. “How have racism and patriotism shaped the experience of African American soldiers?” is a good example.

- Less confident readers might benefit from reading the historical documents in pairs. If this is the case, distribute just one document per pair of students, and allow them to read and reflect together.

Supplementary Materials

- Horace Pippin, excerpt from his World War I memoir, 1921
- James G. Thompson, letter to the editor, Pittsburgh Courier, 1942
- J.S. Leonard, “Digest of War Department Policy Pertaining to Negro Military Personnel,” 1944
- “Opinions About Negro Infantry Platoons in White Companies of 7 Divisions,” 1945
**Think/Puzzle/Explore Worksheet**

Take a few minutes to look closely at a work of art.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do you think you know about this artwork or topic?</th>
<th>What questions or puzzles do you have?</th>
<th>What does it make you want to explore further?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>
Document Reflection Worksheet

Document title ____________________________ Date ____________

Author ____________________________ Audience ____________________________

What does it say? Write a short summary. _______________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think it was written? What was its purpose? ____________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Compelling question ____________________________

How does the document relate to your compelling question? __________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What do you think about the compelling question from this point of view? ______________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What do you think about the artwork from this point of view? __________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What new questions do you have? ________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________