Agency by Design: Think, Feel, Care

This is the second in a series of lessons about systems thinking. It relies on students having a basic understanding that systems are complex things made up of connected, interacting parts. Students should also understand that much of their everyday lives, from the food they eat to the way they travel to and from school, is part of a system. You may wish to prepare by teaching the Agency by Design: Parts, People, Interactions lesson first.

The Agency by Design approach helps students develop a maker mindset through the practice of short, engaging thinking routines. These routines nurture students’ inclination to closely observe their world, explore complex systems, and notice opportunities for change. In this lesson, students focus on the human experience of systems. They analyze artwork to imagine the different and diverse perspectives held by the characters depicted. What individuals think, feel, and care about depends in part on their positions in a system. By adopting the points of view of multiple characters in the same artwork, learners begin to understand how position can change perception.

Grade Level
Grades 4–12

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

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 2: History – Perspectives

Suggested Art Images
Click on the titles below to view high-resolution photographs on the Museum’s website:
• Bicycle Race, 1938, by Antonio Ruíz
• Breaking Home Ties, 1890, by Thomas Hovenden
• Migrant Family, Oklahoma, 1936 (negative); 1981 (portfolio publication), by Arthur Rothstein
• Sugar Cane, 1931, by Diego Rivera
• The Passing Scene (Elevated Streetcar Scene), 1945, by John Woodrow Wilson
• Untitled, from the Kitchen Table Series, 1990 (negative); 2011 (print), by Carrie Mae Weems
Lesson Objectives
Students will be able to:

- Look closely to describe what they see in a work of art and make inferences about it.
- Use visual evidence and reasoning to infer what characters in an artwork think, feel, and care about.
- Understand how a person’s position within a system shapes their perspective and experience.

Materials Needed
- Whiteboard or chart paper
- Screen for projecting Suggested Art Images
- Copies of Bicycle Race (optional)
- Think, Feel, Care worksheets
- Copies of each of the photographs in Untitled, from the Kitchen Table Series (optional)

Lesson Process
1. Project an image of Bicycle Race. Tell students that in this lesson, they will be looking closely at individual characters in works of art to imagine their experiences and points of view. Begin by guiding students through a description of the artwork. Give them a minute to look at the image and ask them to describe what they see.

2. Students may jump to conclusions about what is happening in the painting, but encourage them to slow down and notice specific details. Ask volunteers to focus on one section at a time. Continue to elaborate on that section of the painting until you have described most details. Listen for language like “I see” and “I notice” to make sure students are making observations. When students share an inference or interpretation, ask them what they see that supports the inference.

3. When your students have thoroughly described what they see, ask them to come up with a short caption for what’s happening in the painting. Anything along the lines of “bicycle race” or “people watching a bicycle race” will do.

4. Take a moment now to review the definition of a system. Ask students to think of the bicycle race as a system. What are the parts of the system? Who are the people in the system? What roles do they play? How do they interact? Make a list together of all the different types of people depicted in the painting. This list could also include animals.

5. Challenge your students to be more specific than “cyclist” or “spectator” when listing people. Notice and name the variations that exist within those categories. For instance, there are spectators sitting in the stands, cheering by the side of the street, and sitting on top of a wall and in the trees. Some spectators are children. Some spectators appear to be selling food. The cyclists themselves are in different places.

6. Choose one character as a model for the Think, Feel, Care activity. Someone demonstrating strong emotions, like the cyclist in first or second place, or an excited spectator, will work best.

7. Ask students what clues they might use to imagine what the character thinks, feels, and cares about. Where is the character positioned in the system? How does the character interact with others? What does their body language or facial expression say about their thoughts and feelings? If you could hear this character’s inner monologue, what would it sound like? Guide students to make inferences based on visual evidence.
8. After practicing together, have students work in pairs. Each pair will find two characters in the painting whose experiences and perspectives they think are very different. They might choose the cyclist in first place and the cyclist in last place, or a spectator in the stands and one standing by the road. Allow students to choose animals as their characters as long as they can support their inferences. Ask them to be as specific as possible. What do they see that makes them think these characters have different points of view? It may be helpful to hand out copies of the artwork and have students circle their choices.

9. Give students copies of the Think, Feel, Care worksheet. Pairs of students should spend time discussing their characters and the differences between them before completing the worksheets. When they are ready to write, they will step inside the character’s point of view and describe what they think, feel, and care about in the first person. Circulate and support students as necessary.

10. When students are finished writing, invite each pair to act out a scene performing their respective characters’ thoughts, feelings, and cares. Use these performances as an opportunity to reflect on the exercise. Reflection questions might include:
   - How do the perspectives and experiences of these two characters differ, and why?
   - Did anyone portray the same character in a different way? Why did they make different choices?
   - How might a character’s position or status within the system affect their point of view?
   - What else would you like to know about your character to understand their perspective better?
   - What do you notice about your own point of view and what it takes to understand someone else’s?

**Extension and Assessment**

- If your students have already done the Agency by Design: Parts, People, Interactions lesson, return to an artwork familiar from that lesson. Sugar Cane or The Passing Scene (Elevated Streetcar Scene) would be an especially powerful choice. Have students repeat the Think, Feel, Care partner exercise. This time, ask them to choose two characters whose points of view are in tension or conflict. Encourage students to develop specific characters to inhabit and avoid stereotypes (e.g. James, the person of color going to work on the streetcar, as opposed to a generic person of color). Reflection questions might include:
  - How does the artist show that there is tension or conflict among the people in a system?
  - What are the reasons that tension might exist?
  - When there is a power imbalance in a system, how does it influence individuals’ points of view?
  - Is it possible to truly understand someone else’s experience if you haven’t lived a similar experience?

- Families are familiar and accessible systems for students to explore. After introducing Think, Feel, Care, try this lesson using Breaking Home Ties or Migrant Family, Oklahoma. Before asking students to adopt a specific character in each family, thoroughly explore the image and discuss the story it tells. Context is an essential clue to the characters’ thoughts, feelings, and concerns in these artworks.

- Try this activity with advanced high school students, exploring the relationship dynamics depicted in Untitled, from the Kitchen Table Series. When students work in pairs, give each pair a different image from the series of photographs. Your reflection discussion might include questions about how the same characters seem to think, feel, and care differently in each image. What do the photographs say about human relationships?
Think, Feel, Care
Take a few minutes to look closely at a work of art. Choose a character in this artwork and step inside their point of view. Write in the first person.

My character is

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the character <strong>thinking</strong> about?</th>
<th>What does the character <strong>feel</strong>? What are their emotions?</th>
<th>What does the character <strong>care about</strong>? What is important to them in this moment?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think...</td>
<td>I feel...</td>
<td>I care about...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Untitled, From the Kitchen Table Series (detail 1), 1990 (negative); 2011 (print) by Carrie Mae Weems
(Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Marion Boulton Stroud, 2011-194-2a–c)
Untitled, *From the Kitchen Table Series* (detail 2), 1990 (negative); 2011 (print), by Carrie Mae Weems (Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Marion Boulton Stroud, 2011-194-2a–c)
Untitled, From the Kitchen Table Series (detail 3), 1990 (negative); 2011 (print) by Carrie Mae Weems (Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Marion Boulton Stroud, 2011-194-2a–c