Artful Thinking: Circle of Viewpoints

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.

In this lesson, students look at iconic American symbols from the diverse viewpoints of the users and stakeholders connected to them. They also consider their own relationship to the symbols, reflecting on experiences, feelings, assumptions, and opinions. Recognizing multiple perspectives helps learners understand that people may see things very differently depending on their relationship to an object or system.

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:

- Brillo Boxes, 1964, by Andy Warhol
- Flag of the United States, c. 1967, by William Nelson Copley
- Mr. Prejudice, 1943, by Horace Pippin
- My Country Needs Me, 1996, by Rodney Ewing
- Untitled (Think), 1967, by William Nelson Copley

Lesson Objectives
Students will be able to:

- Look closely to describe what they see in an object or work of art.
- Make connections to consider an object or artwork from many different perspectives.
- Understand how personal experiences, beliefs, interests, and circumstances can shape the way we view objects in our world.

Flag of the United States c. 1967
William Nelson Copley (American)
Wool
25 × 33 inches (63.5 × 83.8 cm)
Gift of The Young-Mallin Archive, 2007
2007-194.3
© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or chart paper for Parts, Perspectives, Me and Circle of Viewpoints charts
- An American flag or an image of the flag
- Screen for projecting Suggested Art Images
- Copies of Flag of the United States
- Parts, Perspectives, Me worksheets
- Circle of Viewpoints worksheets

Lesson Process

1. Begin the lesson by asking students to visualize the American flag. Can they describe it in detail without looking at it? After giving them the opportunity to do so, show them either a physical flag or an image of the flag. What details did they remember? What did they miss?

2. Have students work together on a detailed description of the flag. What are its parts (colors, stripes, stars)? What is the purpose or meaning of each part? Begin a Parts, Perspectives, Me chart on the whiteboard or chart paper. Make a list of student descriptions in the Parts column. If students don’t know what the stars and stripes symbolize, help them find that information.

3. Tell students that in this lesson, they will be considering symbolic objects like the American flag from many different points of view. They will think about how personal experiences, beliefs, interests, and circumstances can shape the way an individual sees an object or artwork.

4. Ask students to brainstorm different viewpoints on the American flag. The brainstorming may be done as a class, with partners, or individually, but the result should be a list of different and diverse points of view in the Perspectives column of your chart. Use the following questions to prompt students’ thinking:
   - From what different physical perspectives have you seen the flag in the real world?
   - How might people from different points in time view the modern American flag?
   - Who, and what, is affected by the flag? Who interacts with it, and why?
   - Who is involved with or connected to the flag in some way?
   - Who might care about the flag?

5. Once you have generated a list of many viewpoints from which to see the American flag, ask students to consider how these perspectives might be different, and why. For instance, you might compare perspectives from different points in American history. Or ask students how the perspective of an American citizen might differ from that of someone in another country. How might the perspective of a military veteran differ from that of someone who has never served? This is an opportunity for students to share personal or family experiences and a natural transition into the next step in the routine.

6. Finally, ask students to consider their own relationships to the American flag. How does it connect with their lives or the lives of people they know? What does it mean to them, and why? Give students a few minutes to pair-share before asking volunteers to share with the class. Write a few responses in the Me column of your class chart.

7. Break students into small groups of three or four for the next part of the lesson. Now that they have thought about different ways of seeing the American flag, they are going to look closely at artworks that represent the American flag. They will make inferences about the artist’s point of view and think about how others might see and respond to the artwork. They will also consider how their own perspectives shape the way they see and interpret the image.
8. Pass out *Parts, Perspectives, Me* worksheet and a copy of *Flag of the United States* to each group. Students will complete the worksheet with observations and thoughts about this new image. Review instructions for the worksheet and refer to your American flag chart as an example.

9. As students are working, encourage them to notice ways that the artwork is similar to or different from the American flag. What new perspectives, such as that of the artist, might they consider? What might the artist’s choices reveal about their point of view? How might the artist’s choices affect other people’s perspectives? How do students view the artwork differently from how they viewed the flag?

10. Allow some time for volunteers to share their ideas about *Flag of the United States*. Do they have the same point of view, or do they see the artwork differently? What experiences, beliefs, or circumstances might account for different perspectives?

11. Pass out the *Circle of Viewpoints* worksheet and explain the activity to students. They will choose three different perspectives from which to explore *Flag of the United States*. Students will write about what they think and what they wonder from those points of view. Do one example together to demonstrate writing in the first person and inhabiting a specific point of view.

12. There are several possible ways to adapt *Circle of Viewpoints* for students’ needs and interests.
   - Limit student choice by giving them “yourself” and “the artist” as two points of view and allow them to choose the third. This variation emphasizes making inferences about the artist and drawing on personal connections.
   - Have three students work together on one circle. Each student should be responsible for thinking and wondering from a unique viewpoint. The focus of this variation is on students’ understanding of how their unique viewpoints might differ and why.
   - Incorporate research into the activity by having students gather more information about the points of view that interest them. They might interview people in their lives who exemplify a specific viewpoint or learn more about the artist and his work.

13. Wrap up the lesson by forming a circle, if you can, and inviting each student to read the thoughts and questions they wrote about *Flag of the United States* from one point of view. When everyone has spoken, guide students to reflect on the experience. What are the challenges in trying to see things from someone else’s perspective? What did they learn about themselves by thinking deeply about their own points of view? What new ideas or questions arose as students listened to each other?

**Extension and Assessment**

- Explore more representations of the American flag, such as *My Country Needs Me* and *Untitled (Think)*. Encourage students to learn more about each artists’ point of view. How do the artist’s perspectives influence how they see and represent the American flag? How might others, including students, see and respond to their work?

- Begin this lesson with the Statue of Liberty instead of the American flag. For *Circle of Viewpoints*, use *Mr. Prejudice*. This might be a good variation if you anticipate that your students will struggle to imagine different perspectives. Scaffold their understanding by naming the different types of people in the painting and discussing possible difference in their points of view.

- Expand the conversation into topics like consumerism and popular culture by trying the *Circle of Viewpoints* activity with Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes*. 
Parts, Perspectives, Me
Take a few minutes to look closely at an object or work of art.

| What are its *parts*? Describe as many pieces or components as you can. | What *perspectives* can you look at it from? Think about users, makers, and other relationships. | How are you involved? What experiences, beliefs, or interests affect your point of view? |
Circle of Viewpoints

Take a few minutes to look closely at an object or work of art. Write about the artwork from three different points of view.

I think...  
I wonder...

Viewpoint #1

I think...  
I wonder...

Viewpoint #2

I think...  
I wonder...

Viewpoint #3