

The 3 Whys

A routine for nurturing a disposition to discern the significance of a situation, topic, or issue keeping global, local, and personal connections in mind.

Why might this [topic, question] matter to me?

Why might it matter to people around me [family, friends, city, nation]?

Why might it matter to the world?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine nurtures a disposition to discern the significance of a situation, topic, or issue, keeping in mind global, local, and personal connections.

Application: When and where can I use it?

The routine can be applied to a broad range of topics, issues, and activities. You may use a powerful image, text, quote, video, or other materials to ground students' thinking. You may find this routine useful early in a unit after the initial introduction of a topic, when you want students to consider carefully why it might be worth investigating further. Teachers have also used this routine to expand on a given issue in order to help students become aware of that issue's far-ranging impact and consequences at the local and global levels. In other cases, the routine is used to create a personal connection to a topic that might initially seem remote.

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

Ensure that the students have clarity about the focal point of the analysis. For example, you might ask your students, "Why might understanding social inequality matter to our community?" as opposed to, "Why might this image matter?" Use the questions in the order proposed or in reverse order, beginning with whichever one you think will be the most accessible entry point. For instance, students might identify and articulate the purpose and significance of a story they are reading by first reflecting about why the story matters to them, and then moving on to the questions about their community and the world. In other cases, a teacher may seek to construct a more personal connection to a distant event, thus beginning with the world, then working inward. Invite students to work on one step at a time. If they try to work on all three questions at once, nuances and distinctions between the personal, local, and global may be lost. If time allows, compare and group students' thoughts to find shared motivations and rationales for learning the topic under study.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags #PZThinkingRoutines and #The3Whys.