Minnesota Humanities Center

Gallery Walk

About

Gallery Walks are a structured discussion routine in which students rotate through multiple sources, responding to each and building on the thinking of others. By combining movement, collaboration, and written reflection, this routine helps students engage deeply with multiple perspectives while practicing observation, interpretation, and questioning.

Repeatable Routine

Approximate Time: 20–35 minutes

Students analyze multiple sources by rotating in groups, recording their thinking, and responding to peers' ideas. This routine builds collective understanding across sources and encourages students to synthesize information through discussion and reflection.

Best Used When:

- Analyzing multiple sources or perspectives
- Encouraging collaboration and movement
- Building understanding across a set of related materials
- Practicing evidence-based discussion and synthesis

Set Up: Select 4–6 sources (images, documents, maps, etc.) and post them around the room with chart paper or space for student responses. Number each station clearly.

Teacher establishes norms:

- "Read and respond to others' thinking."
- "Use evidence from the source to support your ideas."

Divide students into 4–6 groups and assign each group a starting station. Use a timer to keep the rotations focused.

Activity: In small groups, students rotate through each station, spending 3–5 minutes engaging with each source. The teacher uses a visible timer and signals when it is time to rotate. As students work, the teacher circulates to prompt deeper analysis and support discussion.

At each station, students:

- Analyze the source and record their observations, interpretations, and questions.
- Read other groups' responses and add new thinking, extending or challenging ideas when appropriate.

After visiting all stations, groups return to their original station to review the full set of responses. Students discuss patterns, similarities, and differences across the collected ideas.

The class then debriefs key insights, with the teacher explicitly naming and reinforcing disciplinary skills such as sourcing, corroboration, and synthesis.

Extension: Students write a brief reflection or summary that cites evidence from the gallery walk to address the following questions:

- "What patterns did you notice across sources?"
- "How did your thinking change after reading others' responses?"
- "What questions remain?"
- " Sort first, label later. Trust what you notice."
- " You need to be able to explain why everything in a category belongs together."

Activity: Students sort the cards into columns based on patterns they notice. After sorting, students create a label for each column that explains what brings the items together and why. In upper grades, students also explain what their categories reveal about power, systems, or historical change.

The teacher then introduces academic vocabulary, and students match the terms to the categories they created.

When complete, groups share one of their categories with the class, explaining the category's name, what it includes, and why those items belong together. In upper grades, students also share what the category reveals about power, systems, or historical change. As students share, the teacher names the disciplinary skills being practiced, such as categorization, causation, and building an argument from evidence.

Extension: Throughout the unit, students collect their own excerpts, images, and definitions to build a tree map over time. The completed tree map is used as a prewriting and organizational tool for the summative task.

Tips for Implementation

- **Use a visible timer to maintain pacing.** Keeping rotations consistent ensures all groups engage with each source and prevents rushed or incomplete thinking.
- **Provide sentence starters**. Sentence starters scaffold student responses and support clear distinctions between observation, interpretation, and questioning.
    - *"I notice...,"*
    - *"I think...,"*
    - *"I wonder..."*
- **Emphasize both content and context analysis.** Students should attend not only to what the source shows or says, but also to who created it, when, and why.
- **Integrate structured prompts.** Integrating other repeatable routines with gallery walks help maintain rigor and ensure responses go beyond surface-level observations.