Minnesota Humanities Center

See, Think, Wonder

About

See, Think, Wonder is a structured routine that helps students slow down their thinking by separating observation, inference, and questioning into distinct stages. It encourages careful attention to evidence, supports disciplinary reasoning, and makes thinking visible for both students and teachers. This routine is flexible and can be used with a wide range of social studies sources, including images, text, maps, and primary documents.

The general structure for this routine is organized into three sequenced steps.

1. **See:** Describe only what is visible (things you could point to); no inferences.
2. **Think:** Make evidence-based inferences and interpretations.
    - *"I see ___, which makes me think ___."*
3. **Wonder:** Pose questions based on observations and thinking.
    - *"I see ___, which makes me wonder ___."*
    - *"I think ___, which makes me wonder ___."*

Throughout the routine, use a visible timer and remind students to record their thinking during each step before moving on to the next.

Repeatable Routines

Routine 1: Writing – See, Think, Wonder

Approximate Time: 10–15 minutes

Students slow down their thinking by separating observation, inference, and questioning. This routine helps students develop habits of mind similar to experts, making careful interpretations before generating questions for deeper inquiry.

This activity can be done individually, in partners, small groups, or as a whole class.

Best Used When:

- Introducing a new source or concept
- Encouraging careful observation and evidence-based reasoning
- Building curiosity and investigative thinking

Set Up: Provide students with a source such as an image, map, graph, or text excerpt, and a paper divided into three sections labeled See, Think, and Wonder. Use a timer to keep each stage focused.

Teacher establishes norms:

- "We start with see, then move to think, then wonder. At each stage, do your best to focus only on what that stage asks you to do."
- "There are no right or wrong answers. Our job is to notice carefully."
- "Write for the whole time. It's better to write too much than not enough."

Activity: Students complete the See, Think, Wonder routine in three stages.

- **See:** Students write down everything they can physically observe from the source (things they could point to), using bullet points. They avoid guesses, opinions, and explanations. When time is up, students share one observation with a partner or the class.

- **Think:** Students use their observations to make careful, evidence-based inferences by completing the sentence stem:
    - *"I see ___, which makes me think ___."*

  Students write for the full time, focusing only on reasoning supported by evidence. When time is up, students share one inference with a partner or the class.

- **Wonder:** Students generate meaningful, open-ended questions that help them investigate the source more deeply, using the sentence stems:
    - *"I see ___, which makes me wonder ___."*
    - *"I think ___, which makes me wonder ___."*

  When time is up, students share one question, and the class selects 3–5 questions to discuss.

Extension: Provide students with an additional source on the same concept. Students complete Change, Challenge, Confirm to explain how the new information revises their thinking.

Routine 2: Gallery Walk (Multiple Sources)

Approximate Time: 20–30 minutes

Students rotate through multiple images, separating observation, interpretation, and questioning across structured rounds. This routine builds collective thinking by allowing students to respond to and build on one another's ideas.

Best Used When:

- Analyzing multiple sources or perspectives
- Encouraging movement and collaboration
- Building shared understanding through peer thinking

Set Up: Post 4–6 sources (images, documents, maps, etc.) around the room with space for student responses at each station. Use a visible timer to guide each stage and keep the routine focused.

Teacher establishes norms:

- "At each stage, do your best to focus only on what that stage asks you to do."
- "There are no right or wrong answers. Your job is to notice carefully."
- "Read others' thinking before adding your own."

Activity: Students rotate through each station, completing the See, Think, Wonder routine at every source before moving on.

- **See:** Describe only what is visible in the source (things you could point to).
- **Think:** Read previous notes and add evidence-based inferences using the frame: *"I see ___ which makes me think ___."*
- **Wonder:** Read others' thinking and add their own open-ended questions.

Groups continue rotating until all sources have been visited.

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See, Think, Wonder Worksheet

See	Think	Wonder