

STEP INSIDE

Think about a person or an object that is a part of or connected to the event or situation you are examining. Place yourself within the event or situation to see things from this point of view. Some questions to consider:

- What can this person or thing see, observe, or notice?
- What might the person or thing know, understand, hold true, or believe?
- What might the person or thing care deeply about?
- What might the person or thing wonder about or question?

The idea of stepping inside or embodying a character or historical figure is one that teachers have long made use of. Sometimes students do this in a way that deepens their understanding and appreciation of the character and events, and other times it may be more superficial. By adding just a few guidelines to the process of stepping inside a character, as this routine does, we can structure students' thinking and, we hope, deepen their understanding.

Purpose

From a very early age, children's games often involve role play and imagining being someone else. Like Circle of Viewpoints, this routine focuses on perspective taking. However, it seeks to provide a structure to take this thinking to another level and to develop an even greater empathetic response. By asking the learner to hypothesize what this person or thing observes, understands, believes, cares about, and questions, this routine helps students to delve even more deeply into the person or thing. It takes the learner outside himself or herself to understand that one's perspective often shapes how events are understood. As such, the Step Inside routine can be an effective way for students to push their thinking further than what they might do in Circle of Viewpoints.

Selecting Appropriate Content

To develop an empathic response that shows a deeper awareness and appreciation of the other's perspective, it is important that students have good source material with which to work. Material that evokes an emotional response and/or embodies some sort of dilemma or question having multiple perspectives often works well. With such material,

different takes on the situation can be expressed and supported with evidence and/or logical explanations or theories. The idea is for the students not to be fanciful when stepping inside, but to try to see things from a different perspective based on evidence. This is one of the reasons this routine begins by noticing and observing from the person or object's perspective. These observations become the basis for the stances, opinions, and ideas that follow.

A potential provocation for Step Inside might be an event depicted in a work of art, a social issue that has been in the news, a story or novel that the class has read, a photograph from the newspaper, or a proposed policy. Often it is helpful first to identify all of the possible viewpoints, including the inanimate ones, that are present in the event or situation. For this reason, the Circle of Viewpoints routine is often linked to Step Inside. However, there can be occasions when you will want students to explore a particular viewpoint that you assign, and that is okay.

Steps

1. *Set up.* After the image, video, audio, story, issue, or question has been introduced, provide time for learners to think about the players and observers (both animate and inanimate) in this scenario and either ask them to select a person or thing to Step Inside (Note: You may want to use Circle of Viewpoints as part of the set-up), or, if it suits the learning, assign class or group perspectives. Decide whether you will do the routine as a whole class (this works well the first time through the routine), in groups, or individually.
2. Ask, "What can this person or thing see, observe, or notice?" Ask students to imagine themselves as the person or thing they have selected and describe what they could now see, observe, or notice. This can be done as a simple list of items generated by individuals in writing or by the class aloud and documented by the teacher.
3. Ask, "What might the person or thing know about, understand, or believe?" Ask students to respond to this prompt from the chosen perspective. Make a list of these ideas. This kind of thinking may be a bit of a stretch initially, but very soon students immerse themselves into this new viewpoint and either write or speak about the new knowledge and beliefs. If done as a whole class, you might follow up students' responses with "What makes you say that?" to focus on the evidentiary basis for these statements.
4. Ask, "What might the person or thing care about?" Ask students to respond to this prompt from the chosen perspective. Record these ideas. Encourage students not only

to state this but also to provide information as to why this person or thing would or might care about these matters.

5. Ask, “*What might this person or thing wonder about or question?*” Ask students to respond to this prompt from the chosen perspective. Make a list of these ideas. Again, you may ask for the reasons and justification behind these.

6. *Share the thinking.* If the routine has been done as a whole class and documented, then the group’s thinking has been visible throughout the process and there is a record of all responses. Looking at the documentation, ask the class to articulate what image of the character is emerging. If the routine was done individually, group students together in one or more ways: One option is to form groups with each person in the group having chosen a different perspective. Another option is to ask students who have chosen the same perspective to compare their Step Insides. Another alternative is to discuss the issue or dilemma at hand as a whole class, inviting students to introduce their thinking from different viewpoints as a stimulus for class discussion.

Uses and Variations

Saroj Singh, a grade 4 teacher at Bialik, introduced this routine at the beginning of the year to assist with issues relating to friendship, bullying, and acceptance within and outside the class. Saroj read several books and poems on accepting differences. One of the poems dealt with the impact of gossip and described how a comment that had started as a joke caused the character in the poem, David, to be so unhappy as to leave the school he had just started. The children were asked to step inside David’s shoes. Students commented that, as David, they knew, “I am sad, that people laugh at my accent, that I am invisible,” and that David cared about “what people think, having friends, and being accepted,” among other responses. Both Saroj and her students found the impact of this routine in this situation both humbling and powerful.

Another fourth grade teacher, Jan Zimba at List Elementary in Frankenuuth, Michigan, used Step Inside when her students were studying about electricity. She asked her students to think about what they had learned about circuits and the various circuits they had explored, such as lights and doorbells. Students then selected one aspect of a circuit: the wire, the electrons, the light bulb filament, and so on, to Step Inside. After students had written their responses to the question prompts, the class played a game in which a student read his or her responses without revealing the chosen perspective, and the rest of the class tried to guess the viewpoint they had chosen.

When studying texts at senior levels, Bialik English teacher Sharon Berenholtz found that her students tended to focus primarily on the main characters. Sharon found that by asking her students to follow the steps of this routine and Step Inside some of the minor characters, ones often overlooked, the routine gave students deeper insights into the text, helped them understand different perspectives, and gave them a greater appreciation for the complexity of the crafting of a powerful narrative. Similarly, elementary art teacher Barbara Jaffe, also at Bialik, found that asking her students to Step Inside works of art gave students new insights into the works. Depending on her purpose, Barbara would ask her students to Step Inside the buildings, the artist, the people in the painting, or an inanimate part of the picture. This led to many vibrant discussions with students comparing the different stories created when looking through “different eyes.”

Assessment

In students’ responses, take note to see if they are merely stating the obvious and the most clearly defined and widely known aspects of the topic—which is a fine place to start—or if they are able to infer and hypothesize what might be happening. Are they aware of the complexities of what someone may feel or care about? Or, are they unable to move beyond their own positions, feelings, and questions? Are students’ responses calling for inference still based on evidence and reason? Can they build a plausible case for the positions they advocate?

Sometimes teachers use Step Inside as a precursor to more elaborated writing, as is shown in Sharonne Blum’s Picture of Practice following. In these situations, look to see how students are able to use the routine as a starting place for their writing rather than merely an end in itself. Are they able to create a rich and full sense of a character using the ideas generated from the routine?

Tips

The terminology is worth thinking about when introducing this routine. Notice the use of the word *might* in the second, third, and fourth questions in the routine. By asking “What might the person or object wonder?” rather than “What does the person or object wonder?” the teacher implicitly sends the message to students that the idea is not to find a single definitive answer but generate reasonable possibilities and alternatives. We can never know exactly what a river, a dog or, for that matter, a historical figure is thinking, feeling, wondering, or caring about, and the use of this conditional language opens the way for thinking broadly, hypothesizing, and raising possibilities.

Be adventurous with the use of this routine; it can lead to some of the most creative and insightful thinking. Encourage students to take the perspective of the unexpected. We have seen examples of five-year-olds "stepping inside" the curtains in a room where a celebration is occurring and providing carefully considered thoughts and observations about the events taking place, or teachers discussing a newspaper photo of soldiers in Iran through very different perspectives ranging from the soldiers' shoes to the butts of the rifles, and students "stepping inside" countries and cities and even their own classrooms.

Teachers of young children may feel that perspective taking is difficult for young children, yet role play and fantasy are a large part of their world. Perspective taking is a skill that can and should be further developed through many and different opportunities. One strategy Emma Furman, a grade 2 teacher at Blaik, created was making the Step Inside routine more concrete by providing cutouts of pairs of shoes for the children to step into when changing viewpoints. This proved most effective and popular, with the children enjoying the novelty. In a very short time the students would visualize the stepping inside process and no longer chose to use the cutout shoes.

To avoid this routine becoming just a fun activity, think about what you hope students will learn through the process of stepping inside. Do you want them to have a better understanding of the complexity of a problem or issue? Do you want them to understand a particular character better and eventually be able to produce writing that will demonstrate their understanding?

A Picture of Practice

Grade 7 students at Blaik College were studying ancient Egyptian history. Their teacher, Sharonne Blum, was concerned that her students were not fully understanding the significance of the Nile River in ancient Egypt. Sharonne selected the Step Inside routine to help her students flesh out the role of the Nile in the lives of the ancient Egyptians. Conscious of how hard it can be for teenagers to relate to the past, Sharonne thought that if her students made an emotional connection they could better understand the importance of the Nile, both spiritually and agriculturally.

To help her students begin to make that emotional connection with the Nile and understand a little of its past, Sharonne began by setting the scene. She asked

students to close their eyes while she dramatically read an ancient Egyptian prayer honoring and worshipping the Nile. She then asked them to imagine that they were the Nile, flowing down through Egypt, seeing farmers checking on flood levels and babies bathing. Sharonne encouraged her students to visualize what else might be in front of them and happening around them and gave them time to silently envision the events in their minds' eye. The students became completely immersed in their thoughts.

Sharonne then asked them to open their eyes and to capture on paper what they had seen and felt and individually write those words. To assist this process, Sharonne shared the questions of the Step Inside routine with her students, asking them what, as the Nile, were they seeing before and around them? What did they know about, believe, and understand? What did they care about and wonder? Students used these prompts to record their thoughts and ideas, some making lists, others writing in more complete sentences.

Once students had their ideas before them, Sharonne asked students to use their list of words and thoughts to each compose a poem or work of prose writing from the perspective of the Nile. One student's poem is reproduced here:

I am the Nile River

By Jemima

I can see the farmer with his animals.

Boy with his friends playing on my bank.

I can see a woman washing her clothes in the water.

I can feel the sunlight trickle down on me. I know that I am helping all the people.

So I continue to flow.

I flow past the boy and the farmer and past the woman.

Now it's just me. I am solitary and I grow quieter.

Soon I see an old man drink from me. I smile to myself and am glad that I could help him.

The animals drink and swim as I splash through the rocks and roots.

I stare as far as I can and I see the place they call the Red Lands. They are long and dry and I am glad I give the people what they need.

Another student's work of prose appears following.

Step Inside: I am the Nile River . . .

By Davina

As the Nile River, I tend to travel constantly through Egypt, as if I am a whirlpool and there's no way of stopping myself. As I pass I spot women and children greeting me and using me to wash their clothes, or to collect water. Animals indulge in my waters, and I support boats and others who swim in me. Farms, people, animals and plants live off me. People use me for fishing and I am surrounded by vegetation. If I look into the distance I can see the Red Lands. Plants of food grow because of me and people with weapons fight over me. People are living because of me. Children play on the banks.

I feel powerful because I am a source of life. I feel used, exploited because I am open to everyone. I feel that I am the centre of gravity. I give fruit water and nourishment. At times I feel terrible because of the vegetation, people take my molecules of water — they are considered my friends. I am humbled because I notice the impact that I have. However, I want to help the Red Lands. It is very dry there. I feel disrespected, because if I am considered holy, then why do people dirty me?

I feel I am helping the environment and people, and I have the ability to save people. I tend to feel guilty at times for starting wars, because people fight over me. I feel special because I watch and am a part of sacrifices. I feel proud and happy.

Sharonne was surprised by the quality and detail of the writing. "Before I have asked students to pretend they were someone or something else, but there was never the detail that I saw in these poems and prose. By deconstructing the information in the steps of the routine, it's like you are looking at a building, but not just seeing its shape, but really noticing the individual bricks. There are things you can't see if you don't take some of the bricks apart. Step Inside enables people to 'see' things that they might otherwise have missed if all they saw was the whole building—the overarching theme."

Reflecting on students' learning as evidenced in both the poems and prose written after doing Step Inside, Sharonne observed, "It provides opportunities to pay attention to details and intricacies and slows the process down so there are fewer pat answers and the students notice things they wouldn't always notice. If I had asked them to pretend to be the Nile, they would have fallen back on clichés. A peaceful atmosphere was created, it was calmer with thoughts flowing and time to document."

RED LIGHT, YELLOW LIGHT

As you read, view, or listen to the material before you, consider the following questions:

- What are the *red lights* here? That is, what things stop you in your tracks as a reader/listener/observer because you doubt their truth or accuracy?
- What are the *yellow lights* here? That is, what things slow you down a bit, give you pause, and make you wonder if they are true and accurate or not?

In our research into the development of thinking dispositions, we identified a key place where dispositions falter: the spotting of occasions for application. People often have the thinking skill, but they fail to use that skill because they didn't spot occasions for its use. This led our colleague David Perkins to develop the Red Light, Yellow Light (RLYL) routine that focused specifically on the spotting of occasions to be skeptical and ask questions. Spotting these occasions would cause students to be more active listeners and readers, to have their skepticism antennae up if you will. Using the metaphor of a traffic light, students are encouraged to think in terms of green lights giving them the freedom to continue, yellow lights as slowing them down, and red lights as stopping them.

Purpose

Red Light, Yellow Light is about becoming more aware of specific moments that hold signs of possible puzzles of truth. Sweeping generalizations, blatant self-interests, oversimplified conclusions, unexpressed bias, hidden motives, and so on can easily come off as incontestable or perhaps even invisible. If students are to develop deep understanding of a topic, they have to learn to see the potential falsehoods and to handle them in ways that aren't dismissive, overlooked, or debilitating. Red Light, Yellow Light should be used often in deliberately different ways to build sensitivity to spotting potential puzzles of truth within claims, ideas, conclusions, generalizations, and so on.

Selecting Appropriate Content

The most suitable content for Red Light, Yellow Light would be source material that presents particular stances, claims, conclusions, or generalizations. Opinion articles in a magazine, mysteries that have yet to be solved, mathematical proofs that might have