The Constitutional Convention: INFER Thinking Routine

In Partnership with Teaching American History

Class Periods: 1 **| Overview:** Analyze artistic representations of the Constitutional Convention in Teaching American History's *The Constitutional Convention* exhibit using the INFER thinking routine.

Steps:

1. Before beginning the activity, make sure students have enough background knowledge about the Constitutional Convention to interpret the images they will encounter. If you have not yet introduced the Convention, provide students with a brief verbal or text-based overview of the event, or invite them to explore primary sources that establish key context about who participated, what they hoped to accomplish, and the major issues they debated. If students are already familiar with the Constitutional Convention, skip to step two.
2. Distribute the INFER thinking routine graphic organizer.
3. Then, walk students through the INFER routine:
    a. **I**magine: Before revealing the collection of paintings, ask students to briefly sketch and/or describe what they imagine the Constitutional Convention looked like. Encourage them to consider people, setting, tone, and action. (Emphasize that neither artistry or even accuracy are the goals of this exercise. This step is about activating prior knowledge and surfacing expectations and assumptions.)
    b. **N**otice: Display Teaching American History's (TAH) collection of artistic representations of the Convention (or choose one of the paintings in the collection) and guide students through structured noticing. Prompt students to consider what is present, what is absent, and whose perspectives appear centered or marginalized.
    c. **F**ind differences: Ask students to directly compare their imagined representations with the artistic renderings in the collection. Support discussion or written reflection focused on differences between expectation and depiction, encouraging students to consider why those differences might exist.

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d. **E**valuate: Ask students to reflect on what the renderings teach us about the Constitutional Convention, the artist's perspective, and broader historical context surrounding each painting's creation along with the context of America's founding.. Encourage students to consider bias, purpose, audience, and how their own assumptions influenced interpretation.
e. **R**eimagine: Extend students' thinking by inviting students to "zoom out" beyond the borders of the images. Ask them to imagine what or who might exist outside the frames and what additional historical context might complicate or deepen our understanding of the Constitutional Convention.

4. Conclude with a discussion, written reflection, or claim-based response connecting the paintings to larger historical themes or inquiry questions. Encourage students to articulate how their thinking evolved throughout the routine.

Guiding Questions for the INFER Routine:

INFER Routine	**Guiding Questions**
Imagine *Briefly sketch what you expect to see.*	Who is present? What are they doing? How are they dressed? Where are they? What does it look like? What other objects are present? What is the tone?
Notice *Look at the real image. Notice carefully.*	What do you see? What do you not see that you might have expected? Who or what is foregrounded or highlighted? What perspectives are represented? What perspectives are not represented?
Find differences *Look for differences between what you have drawn and the visual artifact.*	How does your imagining differ from the visual artifact? What did you include/omit that the

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	creator of the artifact did not?
Evaluate *Interpret what the artifact reveals about the historical event, the creator's perspective, and how this compares with your initial sketch.*	What does the visual artifact teach you about the historical period or event? What does the visual artifact teach you about the perspectives and/or biases of the artist? What does your initial imagining teach you about your own perspectives, biases, or understanding of the event?
Reimagine *Return to your original image and recontextualize it – thinking about what might be beyond the borders of the image itself.*	What might you see? What/ who else might be there? What/ who else could be there? What additional historical context might inform what you would see if the frame were expanded?

Why this works: This thinking routine invites students to activate prior knowledge, recognize preconceptions, and reflect on how those preconceptions may be formed by information they've encountered or by personal biases/blind spots. This routine also introduces students to a visual artifact, to which they will compare their own representation to evaluate perspective, their understanding of the event, and how the event is situated in the larger historical narrative of the period. Students act as historians in a creative context.

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