

# THE ELABORATION GAME

A PRACTICE FOR FOSTERING THE MAKER CAPACITIES:  
LOOKING CLOSELY, EXPLORING COMPLEXITY & FINDING OPPORTUNITY



First, gather in a group around your object. Don't touch or move your object yet. Instead, take a few quiet moments to observe your object closely and give time for each person to make a quick sketch from their vantage point.

When your quick sketch is done, pick up the object, turn it around, move parts, or move yourself around to check it out from various angles. Then add a few notes to your sketch: write down two things you notice about the object and one question you have about it.

Have each person in the group share out their observations and questions. Ask one group member to take notes to capture the group conversation in one color marker. As you take turns, if someone mentions something that you noticed, then try to elaborate on that thing; for example, add another detail or a specific question you have that builds on what they said.

Leave your paper with individual and group notes with the object as you move onto the next object. You will go through the same steps at this object, but add your notes to the previous conversation in a different colored marker than the group before you and try to elaborate on their observations or questions. Do the same with your third object.

Now, return to your original object and take the time to read all three sets of observations and questions. Prepare a brief 1-minute 'infomercial' that describes your object. The infomercial should include some questions and observations that came up from the three conversations.

As a class discuss what you learned about these objects from this activity. Share any new questions that you have and what was surprising to learn from your classmates.

## The Elaboration Game

This practice is designed to deepen learners' sensitivity to design through drawing, observing, questioning, and collaborating.

### *When and How Can This Practice Be Used?*

This practice can be used as a launch to notice design at the start of an inquiry or at any point during a unit of study as learners gain knowledge of design elements. The practice challenges students to provide increasingly nuanced verbal descriptions that elaborate on their peers' descriptions. It provides a chance for listening and building shared knowledge. The Elaboration Game reinforces the value of going beyond a quick glance and revisiting an object to learn more.

This practice can be used on its own or along with other Agency by Design thinking routines or practices. Here are some considerations for implementing this practice:

- You will need the following materials for The Elaboration Game: 3 objects (or 2 sets of 3, depending on the number of students). If possible, the objects should relate to curriculum you are working on now or are going to be introducing. Large paper for each table. 3 different colored markers for each round. Pencils or pens and paper for each student to sketch.
- Try this practice as a follow up to a design hunt and ask the students to pick out objects for close observation.
- If students are struggling to come up with new questions, you may provide or suggest a list of question starts:
  - Why...?
  - What if...?
  - How would it be different if...?
  - Who might use...?
- If students are struggling to come up with new or elaborated observations, you may encourage them to focus in on specific parts, or notice through other senses. You can also encourage them to elaborate on someone else's observations by adding details.
- We are grateful to our colleague Brooke Toczyłowski who adapted the game for her English Language Learners and shared the importance of pre-teaching the terms "elaboration" and "to elaborate" through definitions, similar terms and examples before starting the game. An additional scaffold of sentence starters can be a helpful support for all learners.
- We are also grateful to our colleague Tatum Omari who reported out after using The Elaboration Game with her elementary school students to observe a tortilla press. She shared several modifications to the game for younger learners, including looking at just one object in a day and spending more time sketching so Tatum could scribe text for emerging writers.