

# Depth & Complexity

A TOOL TO GROW GIFTED MINDS

HISD  
HOUSTON INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Fig. 1. Depth & Complexity Icons. © J Taylor Education, 2006.

## What is Depth & Complexity?



Depth & Complexity is a framework that uses visual thinking tools (called icons) to help students explore topics more deeply and think more critically.

To learn more about the Depth and Complexity framework visit [depthcomplexity.com](http://depthcomplexity.com).

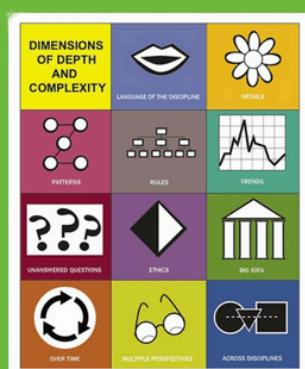
## Why It Matters for G/T Learners



Depth & Complexity Icons are powerful tools to differentiate instruction and challenge G/T students to think more critically and creatively. They provide a framework for exploring topics beyond surface-level understanding, encouraging students to make connections, analyze information, and generate new ideas. Depth enables students to fully grasp a topic's foundational elements, while Complexity empowers them to forge meaningful relationships across concepts.

## Meet the Icons

In HISD, we use Depth & Complexity Icons in G/T lessons to help students move beyond basic understanding. These visual tools—like Details, Patterns, and Big Ideas—encourage critical thinking, connections across subjects, and deeper inquiry. By integrating these icons, we empower gifted learners to develop advanced skills and foster a lifelong love for learning. This resource explains how these icons are used and how you can support your child's growth at home.



## What It Looks Like in Class



In a classroom, Depth and Complexity transforms learning from rote memorization to genuine inquiry. It's not about doing more work, but about engaging with content in deeper and more complex ways.

This might look like students analyzing the "Language of the Discipline" to understand the specialized vocabulary of scientists, identifying "Patterns" in historical events to predict future "Trends," exploring "Multiple Perspectives" on a social issue, or investigating "Unanswered Questions" in a text. Teachers use visual icons to prompt these higher-order thinking skills, guiding gifted learners to become critical thinkers who delve beyond the surface and connect ideas across disciplines and over time.

## How You Can Support at Home



You don't need to be an expert—just ask great questions and stay curious with your child! Here are a few ways to use Depth & Complexity at home:

- After reading a book or watching a documentary, ask: *“What’s the big idea here?”*
- During dinner conversations, ask: *“What questions do you still have about that?”*
- When exploring current events, ask: *“Who might see this differently and why?”*