Purpose: Why use this map?
We often want to develop learners’ understanding of a complex topic over days or weeks. This map can help. It’s not a routine but a way of planning and tracking over time the exploration of a topic. It can help in choosing good routines too.

Application: When and where can I use this map?
Whenever there’s a topic that calls for a broad and rich understanding and learners have enough time to look at it in different ways – anything from a single long lesson to several lessons or a unit. You can use it with students collectively, to help them maintain a bird’s eye view of progress through a topic and to make with them good choices about what to do next. You can use it yourself, to plan topics and to track progress. You can also give copies to students for their individual self-management in pursuing a general class topic or individual projects.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this thinking map?
Explain that the map is for tracking and guiding the exploration of the topic. Explain the metaphor briefly. Invite learners to help chart progress by using the map.

You can create a giant version of the map to put on the wall of a classroom (see diagram below), or just put labels up for the categories if it’s easier to organize on the wall, or personalize the process in some other way. If you’re tracking two or three topics at the same time or multiple groups you might: have two or three wall maps, color code paths on a single map, give learners page-size copies to track their own progress, or invent something else. Whatever works! The main idea is to make visible the developing understanding to mark progress and choose next steps.

It usually makes sense to start with the ‘skin’ and go to ‘getting under the skin’ with mysteries and then on from there to ‘substance’ and toward the ‘core’. You need not use all of the ‘substance’ approaches – whatever fits – and there’s no fixed order. You can go back to something and add at any time of course!