

Networked Learning Communities

learning from each other

learning with each other

learning on behalf of each other

www.ncsl.org.uk/nlc

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Mystery Game

Mysteries are a great example of
“interventions ... that engage
pupils’ cognitive learning [thus]
giving bigger return on effort”

Charles Desforges, 2002



Mysteries are designed to encourage pupils to deal with ambiguity through addressing a question which has no single correct answer, where they are not even sure what information is relevant – rather like real life.

Through the process they have to practice and develop some crucial skills:

- *sorting relevant information from irrelevant information*
- *interpreting information*
- *making links between disparate pieces of information*
- *speculating to form hypotheses*
- *checking and refining*
- *explaining.*

Far too frequently, pupils are given tasks in which they are presented with a page of text and all they have to do is retrieve the right words from the page to complete the task. There is little challenge in this and learning skills are not developed to any significant extent; they just learn how to perform a ritual. This is not how problems or issues present themselves in higher education or real-life problem solving. In these contexts you have to take discreet, apparently unconnected pieces of information and fit them together to make sense of disorder, read between the lines, come up with a variety of ideas and evaluate them.

The successful completion of Mysteries depends on cooperative group work in which productive learning and social relationships are fostered. Inevitably, disagreement may emerge as group members want to do it their own way. This is particularly true of older and more able pupils who are more confident of their opinions. If handled sensitively though (and with patience), pupils can develop speaking and listening skills and learn ways in which group conflicts can be resolved.



Thinking Through Geography David Leat

1899857 42 7. Published by Chris Kington Publishing, 27 Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 7AB

(A list of further reading material is available on the enclosed CD)

The game in this pack has been designed for teachers, but will hopefully model the kind of activity which promotes challenging pupil learning activities.

The video which accompanies this pack and the PowerPoint presentation outlined on the CD are designed to help you use the *Mystery* to facilitate a discussion around the aspects of pupil learning considered in the enclosed think piece 'On Learning and Teaching'. You may also choose to use this to model a pupil learning strategy which promotes high order thinking. At whichever level you choose to use this resource, we make some recommendations in the 'Guidelines' leaflet for managing its use.

Thinking skills strategies, such as *Mysteries*, on their own create challenging, engaging activities for use in the classroom, but by including 'debriefing' (the questioning and discussion which seeks to engage pupils in metacognition) these activities can create rich thinking and learning opportunities for all pupils.

In order to maximise pupil learning, however, adults would benefit from engaging in collaborative planning and reflection around their ability to teach thinking. The video extract transcription (found on the enclosed CD) allows adults to interrogate the learning which occurs in one particular *Mystery* debrief and the role the teacher plays in facilitating this.

The value of this Mystery is in focusing thinking on the levels of learning:

Pupil learning

Although this resource is designed for adults, it models a powerful pedagogic strategy for promoting higher order thinking in the classroom.

In engaging with both 'On Learning and Teaching' and the *Mystery*, adults can begin to make visible the processes they are using to tackle areas of 'learning loss' which may be affecting pupils in their classrooms, schools or networks as well as creating a space to develop new strategies.

Adult learning and professional development

This activity can offer opportunities for adult learning at a number of levels. Maybe it is best for you when it brings adults together to talk about the process and practice in the schools in your network.

It may be that making visible the ways in which 'learning is lost' is a powerful conversation that you have not had in this way before. It may be that the discussion questions on slides 11 and 12 of the enclosed PowerPoint presentation and at the back of the 'On Learning and Teaching' think piece, create a helpful planning framework for learning from each other and/or planning for change.

Leadership learning

There will inevitably be issues raised for leaders at all levels, both within schools as well as across phases and the network. Question 4 of the discussion questions (found on slide 12 of the enclosed PowerPoint presentation and in the 'On Learning and Teaching' thinkpiece) encourages specific consideration of how the issues raised could be managed to promote understanding – a different issue to how learning loss itself can be managed.

School-wide learning

Engaging in the *Mystery* within school (perhaps having done it within the network) could be a powerful strategy for travelling network learning across school. It might also create an opportunity to make visible departmental or year group strategies which do not yet travel within school.

School-to-school learning

Excellent practice or common challenges may exist across network schools. Working in network groups creates an opportunity to share best practice and best process and may allow for network solutions to be created to network challenges.

Network-to-network learning

If networks identify particular areas of strength or weakness this could provide a short or long term focus for the network-to-network consultant and could contribute to the Networked Learning Communities (NLC) Learning Exchange if shared with your network facilitator.

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Guidelines

“It’s the learners who must do the learning. Teachers so often flog themselves to death with teaching without engaging pupils in the learning”

Charles Desforges, 2002

These activities have their origins in Charles Desforbes' speech at the Networked Learning Communities Launch Conference in June 2002. It has since grown into an artefact designed to help you generate discussion around the first level of learning; pupil learning. It has been designed for use within your network, whether with classroom teachers or leadership teams, in schools or across the network. We have attempted to provide you with a number of templates, from which you can run a workshop of approximately 90 minutes in length. There is also an extension activity to help you to dig deeper into pupil and teacher talk within the context of teaching thinking, if you so choose.

Copies of all of these resources can be found on the enclosed CD, allowing you to make adjustments or additions depending on your context or stage of thinking.

Suggested structure for your session

Please use the session template to adapt the game to your own needs. The following structure is merely a suggestion.

Use the enclosed PowerPoint presentation to structure the session:

- At slide 4, where instructed, show section one of the video. This engages participants with the challenges of pupil learning
- Continue with the presentation until slide 6. Participants engage in the *Mystery*. See opposite for Managing the *Mystery*
- Ask participants to reflect on the question on slide 8 – 'How many Toms or Amits do you have in your school?' There are few schools where children do not continue to under-perform. We need to ask how this is possible
- At slide 9 show video extract two
- Slides 11 and 12 (or the final pages of the enclosed 'On Learning and Teaching' think piece) offers four questions which you may wish to use to structure further discussion. Alternatively, you may wish to spend more time focused on pupil talk or teacher talk using section two of the video. A transcription of this extract can be found on the enclosed CD.

Managing the *Mystery*

Having trialled this *Mystery* with a number of teachers, the following guidelines may help you maximise the opportunity for meaningful discussion. The instructions assume you are conducting the mystery with a network group and may need to be adapted if you are using it to promote school-wide learning.

1.

This activity is not called a *Mystery* by chance.

It is essential that little advanced information is given to participants in order to maintain the element of mystery and avoid closing down potential lines of enquiry. We would advise that the only advanced information you provide as a facilitator is organisational instructions such as those on slide 7. Continue with minimal intervention to ensure that you do not impose your own thinking on the group.

2.

We would advise organising groups in cross school groups (no more than four people per group). On one occasion, two groups of three worked at one table, each doing their own *Mystery* but discussing the questions in a group of six; this worked well.

3.

The first task participants should engage in is reading the statements together, before sorting them out to come up with an explanation as to why Tom/Amit failed to do as well as expected. While they are working on their explanations you may wish to stop them briefly to observe how engaged participants are in the activity and to make explicit the kinds of skills they are using whilst doing the task (this may help model the benefits of these kinds of strategies for students).

4.

After about 20 minutes you may wish to get a few groups to feed back their explanations for Tom and Amit's underachievement. Encourage the groups to tell it as a story rather than through a series of classifications at this stage.

5.

If groups have followed the instructions, give them another five minutes to come up with some headings for the classifications they will almost certainly have used. As they feed these back you may wish to list these on a flip chart. Even if these do not match the list identified on slide 10 (from either the PowerPoint presentation or the 'On Learning and Teaching' think piece) we would advise that you offer these to the participants as a summary of the *Mystery*. This will now act as the introduction to section two of the video.

6.

Having watched section two of the video, you could pursue a number of options. We recommend groups work on any of the questions on slides 11 and 12. Alternatively, focusing on pupil or teacher talk using the transcript found on the enclosed CD could be a meaningful focus for investigating 'classroom work.' You may wish to focus, for example, on the practice identified in the video; assessment for learning, thinking skills or on transition issues.