

Dr. Collier's Magic Bag Activity

Materials consist of at least 4 brown paper bags with mix of objects in them. Each bag contains equal numbers of items.



Examples of items that can go into the magic bags:

1. Plastic models of animals: lion, tiger, elephant, zebra, giraffe, fox, bear, panda, wolf, sheep, cow, horse, chicken, pig, goat
2. Toy furniture: chairs, sofa, tables, beds, stove, cupboard, dresser, nightstand, china cabinet, appliances of various sorts.
3. Plastic models of bread: Challah, Tortilla, Baguette, Croissant, Pretzel, Matzah, Soda Cracker, Breadstick, slice of Rye Bread.
4. Plastic models of vegetables: tomato, egg plant, celery, lettuce, onions, potato, carrot, pepper, cucumber, squash, corn, peas, beans
5. One 'odd' object in each bag; for example, a Daruma, an elephant, an eraser, an award, a bow, a watch
6. Plastic models of fruit: apple, pear, banana, grapes, orange, lemon, strawberry, kiwi, grapefruit, pineapple
7. Wooden blocks
 - a. in diverse shapes: rectangle, square, arc, cylinder, half circle
 - b. in various sizes ranging from large to small
 - c. in various colors: blue, purple, pink, yellow, red, orange, green
 - d. with various patterns on them

Participants are asked to sit in groups of 4 or 5 around an empty table. Each group is given one large piece of chart paper and 2 colored markers. Each group is given one closed "magic bag" and told to leave it in the middle of the table while they listen to the directions.

1. Doing an open sort:
 - a. Tell the participants to dump all the items out of the bag and sort them into groups or clusters as they see appropriate.
 - b. After sorting the items into clusters, the group members are to draw circles around their clusters and count the number of clusters they have created.
 - c. Next, the group members are to write down inside each circle a description of each individual item that is in the cluster.
 - d. After all of the individual items are listed, the group is to discuss what the common characteristics of each cluster of objects are and give each cluster a

group name. The name of each group of items is to be written along the outside edge of each circle.

- e. Debriefing should include how and why group members sorted their items the way they did, how they decided upon the group name to give each cluster of items, how they might change their groups or group names, etc.
 - f. Another consideration where groups need more scaffolding is to have the participants take out the objects from the bag and make lists of attributes of each item. They then draw lines connecting the similar descriptive words and put those objects together in one cluster.
- 2.** A follow-up activity could be to have groups get up from their table, move to a different table, and see if they ‘agree’ with the clusters on that table. Debrief on how they would resort or change the clusters and group names.
 - 3.** Another variation of this is to take the objects off of the chart paper and have the participants discuss sorting based only upon the words written down or conversely to put a new piece of paper and have the new group do their own sort of the objects, then compare the two chart papers.
 - 4.** An open sort should be followed by directed sorts:
 - a. Now tell the participants to sort as quickly as they can by whatever characteristic you call out. A star can be given to the group sorting most quickly or some other recognition if you wish.
 - b. Choice can be determined by the teacher, a student caller, or by spinning a wheel with characteristics or attributes on it:
 - i. Color
 - ii. Size
 - iii. Shape
 - iv. Function
 - v. Texture
 - vi. Pattern
 - vii. What the item represents (fruit etc)
 - viii. Country or region of origin
 - ix. Whether “the”, “a” or “an” would be used in front of it
 - x. Time of day you might see it
 - xi. Others as generated by listening to participants answers during item 1.e above.
 - 5.** When doing this in a content or grade level classroom, you can select the items to be sorted and the directed sort by your theme of the week, or the book you are reading, or by other content relevant organizer.