
Categories

Format: Students playing two-on-two.

Materials: Two sets of sortable objects (such as playing cards, pattern blocks, flashcards with shapes on them, and so on) and two to three pieces of paper and pencils for each pair.

Step 1: Each pair of students takes a set of objects and decides on a way to sort them into groups. Students should not let the other pair see their groups. The students come up with a silly name (known publicly) and a definition (known privately) for their groups. They write the silly names on one side of the paper, and the definition on the back.

Step 2: The pairs decide who will go first as the Guessers. The other pair is the Definers. The Definers begin by saying and showing the names of their categories and selecting two objects that belong in each category. They put the objects on the corresponding sheets of paper.

Step 3: The Guessers choose other objects from the Definer's set and ask, "Is this a _____?" The Definers answer yes or no. If they answer no, then the Guessers can keep asking about that object until they find a category for it.

Step 4: When the Guessers feel confident that they know the definition of a category, they say, "We think the definition of a _____ is _____." The Definers reveal the definition to show whether the Guessers were wrong or right. The Guessers and Definers then work together to check that the objects on the paper are examples of the definition, and the objects not on the paper are not examples of that definition.

Step 5: The Guessers and Definers switch roles.

Simpler variation: Provide sheets with the definitions on one side and a silly name and a sample on the other. The Definers' job, then, is to enforce the given definitions rather than coming up with their own well-defined rules.

Example:

Al	Bob	Chuck
3 of clubs	Jack of spades	Queen of diamonds
8 of clubs	King of spades	Jack of diamonds

The Definers might show these three categories. The Guessers ask about the 10 of hearts and learn that it's an Al. They then ask about the queen of hearts and learn that it's a Chuck. They ask about the king of clubs and learn that it's a Bob. They might guess that the definition of an Al is a non-face card, the definition of a Bob is a black face card, and the definition of a Chuck is a red face card. Ideally, they'd want to make some more guesses to confirm their definitions before asking to see the papers flipped over to reveal the definitions.