

3.2.2 Mystery Box Challenge

Brief description, and rules of the implementation of the learning activity

The teacher places several items of different textures, shapes, and familiarity – some familiar, some unusual – into a box. Children try to guess what the object is through touch and then come up with alternative uses for the item beyond its real function. The “Mystery Box Challenge” learning activity is centered around sensory exploration and creative thinking. Children must identify unknown objects solely by touch and then imagine alternative uses for them. This process directly develops creativity, as it encourages children to reimagine familiar objects in new, unusual contexts.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Creativity
- **Complementary/ Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-7 years old	whole class working in small groups	45 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity

1. **Preparation and Tuning In:** The teacher prepares one or more boxes filled with various objects. These should be safe but not immediately recognizable—unusual in shape, old, or rarely used. The goal is to provide diverse tactile experiences through a variety of materials and textures. The teacher explains the purpose and rules, emphasizing it’s an exploratory, playful task with no wrong answers. Students are encouraged to use imagination and touch. It’s important to create a safe group atmosphere, especially for more hesitant children.
2. **Object Exploration – Tactile Phase:** Students approach the box one by one or in groups (e.g., carousel style) and feel an object inside the box using only their hands.
3. **Alternatively, a blindfold can be used without a box.** The aim is to identify the object solely by touch. The teacher may guide them with questions like: “Is it smooth or rough? Cold or warm? Soft or hard?”—this helps perception and also builds vocabulary.
4. **Identification and Description:** Students describe what they felt and guess what the object might be, using their own words freely. All responses are acknowledged by the teacher—this phase is about experimentation, not correctness. The whole class may try to guess together.
5. **Alternative Use Brainstorming (Individually or in Groups):** Once the item is revealed, students enter the creative phase: What else could this object be used for? What role could it play in a story or a play city? They may invent a short story around it (“Imagine it’s a magical item...”). Ideas can be expressed verbally, in drawings, or pantomime.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Flexible classroom seating is ideal to support pair or group work.

How does this learning activity develop this particular skill?

The "Mystery Box Challenge" learning activity is centered around sensory exploration and creative thinking. Children must identify unknown objects solely by touch and then imagine alternative uses for them. This process directly develops creativity, as it encourages children to reimagine familiar objects in new, unusual contexts. Curiosity is naturally activated by the challenge of discovering hidden items, creating a playful and motivating environment. Additionally, the task fosters openness, as children are invited to consider and accept diverse viewpoints and unconventional ideas, while freely expressing their own. The playful format, combined with both individual and group-based exploration, supports active engagement and allows imagination to flourish.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will:

- be able to think creatively about everyday objects, explore unfamiliar sensations with curiosity, and imagine multiple possible functions for the same item.
- understand how flexibility of thinking helps them form hypotheses, compare sensory impressions, and generate alternative ideas.
- be able to describe objects based on tactile cues, express imaginative interpretations, and remain open to unconventional or unexpected viewpoints during group sharing.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

This activity is adaptable for various group settings and can fit at different points in the school day. It's best done individually or in small groups so every student can engage in tactile exploration and share their ideas. The teacher selects safe, everyday or unfamiliar items for the closed box—students reach in with their hands only or wear a blindfold. Objects should be interesting to the touch but not dangerous. Examples: toothbrush, old phone cord, bottle cap, fluffy sock, climbing carabiner, kitchen strainer, toy catapult or spring, jar with plastic caps, hair tie, string or beaded chain, mini funnel, pliers.

Step-by-step Usage: Preparation: Teacher selects 6–10 different items and places them in individual or one shared “feely box.” Sensation: Students take turns feeling the objects. Silence and focus are important students shouldn't reveal the item right away. Guessing: Students or groups share their guesses. Brainstorming: Students find creative, possibly absurd or story-like alternative uses.

Examples: A strainer could be a “rain helmet for dolls” or a “galactic space radar.” A bottle cap could be a “tiny robot head” or a “magical coin.” A sock might be a “monster's sleeping bag” or a “secret message carrier.”

Presentation: Students can draw the new function or act it out as a short scene (e.g., like a commercial or story segment). Each group or individual presents their idea while others observe and give feedback.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- A closed, opaque box (e.g., shoebox with lid)
- 6–10 various objects (different materials, sizes, purposes)
- Blindfolds or alternative touch-only containers
- Paper, pencils for note-taking or drawing
- Interactive whiteboard for group sharing (optional)

Guiding questions

In pairs/small groups:

- “What shape and material is the object?”
- “What does it remind you of?”
- “What could it be used for if we didn’t know its real function?”

Whole class:

- “Was there an object everyone imagined differently?”
- “Which idea was the most creative and why?”
- “What did you learn about yourself or others during the game?”

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Fear or anxiety about touching unknown objects
Tip: Offer alternative roles (observer, assistant, note-taker) so anxious children can join later. Start with a familiar object to build confidence.
- **Challenge:** Safety concerns (sharp edges, allergens, unsuitable items)
Tip: Pre-check every item for safety before placing it in the box. Provide a mixed selection of safe but surprising items (e.g., fuzzy fabrics, springs, silicone shapes).
- **Challenge:** Uneven participation in groups
Tip: Rotate roles (feeler, describer, guesser, presenter). Use time limits or a turn-taking object to give each child an equal chance.
- **Challenge:** Students reveal items too quickly
Tip: Remind them that the goal is sensory exploration, not speed. Trick: Use a sand timer during the tactile phase.
- **Challenge:** Low creativity in alternative-use phase
Tip: Give playful prompts (e.g., “Imagine this object belongs to a superhero... What is it for?”). Model one or two absurd/fantastic ideas to activate imagination.
- **Challenge:** Younger children struggle with abstract thinking
Tip: Use simpler, larger objects for • Beginners (6-7 years old). Let more advanced students choose from “mystery levels” of difficulty.

Difficulty level tailoring

This activity can be adapted to different levels depending on the students’ familiarity with objects and their ability to use them creatively.

- **Beginner learner (6-7 years old):** work with simple, well-known objects where only identification is required. Examples include a pencil, a ball, or a toothbrush.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** students are introduced to less familiar or multipart objects and are encouraged to generate creative ideas for reuse. Examples could be a strainer, a zipper, or a key.
- **Expert learner (9-10 years old):** students combine objects and think of more abstract or symbolic uses, often integrating them into a story or narrative. Examples at this level include a board game piece, an old mobile phone, or a machine part.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

These reflection questions help students recognise, name, and discuss the development of creativity, curiosity, and flexible thinking during the activity.

On curiosity and openness:

- What made you curious while touching the object without seeing it?
- Which part of the object surprised you the most? Why?
- How did your curiosity influence the guesses you made?

On creativity and flexible thinking:

- Which alternative use did you invent that you found the most imaginative?
- How did you come up with new functions for the object?
- How did hearing others' ideas help you think more creatively?

On the process of discovery:

- What helped you stay open to different possibilities?
- Was there a moment when you changed your mind? What triggered it?
- How did touch-only exploration change the way you imagine objects?

On applying the skill to other situations:

- When could creativity and curiosity help you in other subjects (science, reading, problem-solving)?
- How can flexible thinking help you at school or in everyday life?