

Sample starter/thinking activities (Getting set)

A. Mind Spy

As indicated, this is basically 'I spy', but with the object of 'spying' being imagined in the mind's eye.

One variation of the theme of 'getting into another person's mind' is for A to make a simple drawing, then sit back to back and instruct B how they might recreate the drawing, but by referring only to lines, lengths and directions - not shapes, such as circles or squares, and certainly not objects such as windows.

And here is another more elaborate, but rich, variation:

Your Space

Begin with a visualisation (eyes closed): *'Imagine one of your favourite places, perhaps a holiday, or your bedroom, or a park.. Imagine going there now, taking your time.. Imagine being there now, looking around.. Prepare to talk about it..'*

- Invite A's to tell B's about their spaces.
- Invite B's to tell A's about their spaces.
- Invite everyone to show by thumbs (up, down or sideways) how well they felt able to imagine each other's spaces.

The variations on the visualisation aspect of this activity could be great - depending on your, or your pupils', imaginations themselves.

One variation that could be especially helpful for developing inquiry skills would be to encourage pupils to 'wind back' their visualisations (sometimes called 'Mind Movies'), e.g. if they went on some sort of 'journey' in their minds. As noted in B (i), being able to track back over ideas or stages is a valuable skill. What reinforces its value in this case is the fact that the tracking is deliberately metacognitive: pupils are being asked to introspect and assume greater control over their own thinking.

Another aspect of the activity that can be varied is the element of 'favourites'. This powerful adjective/noun can give direct access to a wide range of pupils' experiences and feelings, e.g. favourite films, books, characters, foods, etc. Of course, just identifying one's favourites is no great skill in itself, and here are some variations that push for more depth or subtlety of thinking:

- (i) Link the idea of 'favourite' to the idea of '*criteria*', explaining these as 'what makes you decide' - in this case, that X is your favourite. Pupils could then be asked to make a list of the criteria that they would use to decide, e.g. *Where to go for holiday*, or *What makes a good neighbour*. Of course, effectively one is asking the question 'Why (is that your favourite)?' But talk of *criteria* (as opposed to its singular, '*criterion*') draws attention to the likelihood of there being more than one reason for counting something as your favourite. Thus, one is pushing for depth and complexity, rather than settling for the superficial and simplistic. (N.B. Other useful words in this neck of the 'thinking' woods are: *features* and *properties*.)
- (ii) Play the song, '*My Favourite Things*' (from 'The Sound of Music'), and invite pupils to make a list of 5 of their favourite things, and to compare lists in pairs or trios. You might even open up an inquiry, before or after they make their lists, by asking what the pupils think of the list in the song. If someone regards it as sentimental or 'soppy', for example, you might push them to explain that judgement, or even, further, what sort of things 'press their buttons' if not those.

A third aspect of the activity that could lead into different areas is the focus on 'your', which is consistent with the emphasis in this inquiry on *caring* thinking. In effect, pupils are being challenged to think empathetically - out of their own 'spaces' into the spaces/worlds of others. 'Your Space' could, then, effectively be re-titled '**Your View**', and then a range of possibilities opens up. Here are a couple of suggestions:

- (iii) Present the class with a list of 4 or 5 matters in which they might be expected to have views or opinions, e.g. *'What are your views about: supermarkets, comic relief, advertisements, hoodies, etc.'* Then ask them to talk in pairs about one or more of these matters, and to see how much they agree and how much they disagree with each other.
- (iv) Invite the class to make their own list of 4 or 5 matters for exploration in a 'YourView' conversation.
- (v) Once pupils are used to such conversations, invite them to go straight into pairs and provide each other with a topic of their own for exploration, e.g. *'What's your view on X?'* This would almost certainly result in their seeking out each other's views during inquiries, especially if you encourage their conversations to include other questions, such as *'What makes you think that?'* or *'What if someone said ...?'*

B. Stand Up

This is a real favourite and can be repeated in its basic form many times without pupils tiring of it. Apart from embodying and practising the principle of **OOPSAAT** (Only One Person Speaks/Stands At A Time), it encourages patience and awareness of others (key aspects of emotional and social learning).

Some large or excitable classes, however, may find it hard to achieve a 'full house', in which case success can be built gradually over several sessions, by dividing the class into groups of 6, then 8, then 10, and finally into two equal groups.

The only thing to be wary of in that approach is the risk of its becoming competitive. But even then children may quickly realise that the more competitive they are, the less chance they might have of 'winning'. So, you could emphasise that this is the sort of activity where the most collaborative groups are the more likely to succeed.

You might even find that the activity itself provides the basis for an inquiry into the concepts of *'winning'*, *'succeeding'*, *'competition'*, *'patience'*, etc.!

There are, besides, some good variations on the basic activity:

- (i) It could start, or be combined, with either '**countdown**' or '**countup**', i.e. with (random) pupils calling out a number in sequence, from 1 upwards to X, or from X downwards to 1.
- (ii) You could reverse the process, by starting with everyone on their feet, and asking them to '**Sit Down**' one at a time.
- (iii) The previous variation can lead on to yet another - of sitting down two at a time ('Sit Down in Twos'). This can help pupils practise eye contact, which is the simplest way of reaching an understanding, still without verbal or even non-verbal signals (such as winking). But, of course, the rule of the activity can be negotiated between the pupils themselves.
- (iv) Then again, the last variation might remind one of '**Wink Murder**', which is another simple activity to encourage pupils to look around the group, seeking eye contact.

(With everyone standing, and closing their eyes, you tap one person on the shoulder and she becomes the 'murderer'. Eyes are opened, and then the murderer proceeds to wink at individuals when they make eye contact with her. Anyone seeing the wink sits down, as if 'dead', and the activity proceeds until just one or two people have not been 'murdered', at which point you might give the game away.)

C. Connections

This activity may also be called '**Links**' or '**Associations**', and each of these is a good, alternative, 'thinking' word to introduce into pupils' vocabulary at some point. The latter, especially, lead into 'particular, or common' associations, such as 'peaches and cream', etc. Pupils could be asked, for example, to see how many such particular associations they can come up with (Xs and Ys), or even, as in the TV game, see whether there might be several common associations, and which of these might be the most common.

As explained in Inquiry Plan 2, the activity of 'associating' is random, in the sense that anyone can stand up and make an association, and it need not be a common one at all (though they are asked to give some sort of reason for making it). But the activity could proceed equally well just around the circle.

Here are other possible variations:

- (i) Instead of giving reasons, the next person to make a link could be required to repeat all the elements of the '**chain**' so far, as in the party game 'In my suitcase I packed A, B, C, etc.' In this case, the chain might simply be, for example, '*Cow - linked to Milk - linked to Bottle - linked to Glass, etc.*' Such lists can get a little tedious if there are too many pupils, or some forgetful ones, so one might limit lists to a sequence of any 3 items (cf. 'Last 3 speakers'). But the practice of being able to track a chain of ideas is a very valuable one for any purpose, and especially for building up pupils' capacity to follow an inquiry or argument.
- (ii) The items in a list, say of 20, could be written on the board as they are called out, and then the class works collaboratively to **make and explain new links** between the items, e.g. '*Cow links to Bottle because they both have necks*'. Of course, this same activity could be done with 20 items called out by the pupils at random.
- (iii) Developing this idea, the 20 items could be put into two columns, each of 10. Pupils are then put into pairs or trios and asked to link (or '**map**') each item on the left with just one item on the right. Different pairs or trios are likely to make different links, which could be explored in plenary, or by 'snowballing' (i.e. putting two pairs/trios together).
- (iv) A nice, practical variation on the previous one is to add an **11th item** to the right hand column and, when every pair/trio has linked all 10 from the left to right, ask each one which item was their '11th one out'. Again, differences can be explored.
- (v) Finally, the whole idea of 'linking' leads naturally into one of the most favoured 'thinking' activities, namely '**Odd One Out**'. For this, only 3 items are needed. They can even be picked up ad hoc in the classroom, though there might be some benefit in preparing some sets of 3 (objects, or pictures, or just words). Pupils are asked to come up with as many links as they can between any two items but not linking with the third. For example, with Cow, Milk and Bottle, Milk could be the odd one out because the other two have necks, or are solid; or Bottle could be the odd one out because humans consume cows and milk, but not bottles; or Cow could be the odd one out because you can buy milk and bottles in the shops, but not cows. (N.B. This activity is much favoured for developing thinking because it provides a basis for analytical thinking as well as analogical, i.e. for making distinctions as well as comparisons.)

D. Would you Rather?

This is based on John Burningham's well-known picture book, but there are all sorts of scenarios used now, many of them available via google. Often there is a choice between 4 things, and each of the things can be 'put' in a corner of the room, inviting people to go to the corner of their choice. Making choices with *reason(s)* should be emphasised, and a more advanced version is to examine the **strength** of different reasons.