

Mind Reading

Aim

To rouse curiosity and develop a positive attitude to problem solving.

Procedure

This is a simple trick which intrigues students but which they find hard to work out.

Tell the students that you have the unusual ability to read people's minds. Offer to demonstrate, but say that you will need a victim – er volunteer. Warn them not to volunteer if there are things on their mind that they don't want everyone else to know about.

Have a table at the front with three common objects on it – maybe a pencil, a ruler and an eraser. Also have a small piece of paper and a pen handy. Stand to one side of the table with the volunteer on the other side. Say that you are going to ask the volunteer to make some choices and that you can read their mind to know what they will choose. Ask the volunteer to look at the three objects and focus their thoughts on them. Ask for silence from the class so you can concentrate – ham it up a bit.

Tell the class you managed to read the thoughts and that you know what choice the volunteer is going to make. Tell the class that you will write down their choice on the scrap of paper and do so. Fold it up and hand it to someone in the class for safe keeping. Tell them not to open it.

Take \$50 out of your wallet/purse/pocket and say that you are so confident of getting this right that if you get it wrong, the \$50 belongs to the volunteer. Point out that they can share it with the class, or keep it for themselves. Hand the \$50 to someone else in the class for safe keeping. (Choose someone who will probably give it back.)

Then ask the volunteer to pick up any two of the objects. If they leave the one you wrote down, then pick up the remaining object and say 'Thank you – I knew you would leave me the'. Then ask the person with the scrap of paper to open it up and read it out. Then thank the person with the \$50 and take it back.

If the volunteer picks up the item you wrote down, then ask them to hand you one of them. If they hand you the one you wrote down, hold it up and say 'Thank you – I knew you would choose the'. And proceed as before. If they hand you the other one, put it aside quietly and ask them to hold up the one they are still holding. Then proceed as before.

Ask the volunteer to take a seat again, then explain to the class that:

- 1 You are not really psychic – it's a trick (they are generally very ready to accept that).
- 2 You didn't rely on luck; you know you will get it right; you have done this numerous times and have never lost your money.
- 3 You only ever put money on it once.

Explain that you will do it again later. In the mean time, the challenge is for them to work out how it's done. If anyone thinks they've got it, they can explain it to you quietly and, if they are correct, they can perform the trick for the class. Also ask them, if they think they've got it, not to give it away because you want everyone to have the chance to work it out.

Tell them that it can be hard to work it out after seeing it once, but if they watch a few times and are observant, they might spot clues. They should keep these to themselves until they have worked it out completely. They can show they have it by demonstrating it to the class.

Unless someone in the class has seen it before, you will probably do it several times before anyone gets it. Leaving at least a day between demonstrations adds to the challenge because they tend to forget exactly what you did on previous occasions.

Once a few students have worked it out, then you can do the trick repeatedly until all see it. Explain to any who still don't. Encourage them to try it on their parents.

Tips

It is worth practising this a couple of times before doing it in front of a class. Be a bit of a showman (or show woman).

Some students will be very keen for you to do it again immediately and to keep doing it until they get it. You can do this, but there is probably more mileage in the activity if you do no more than one demonstration in any one lesson.