

Who Stole the Cookies from the Cookie Jar?

For the setup, I place crime scene tape across the entry door of the room to have the kids feel like they are stepping into a real crime scene.

A table is set up at the front of the class with an empty cookie jar on its side, cookie remnants left out, an empty glass (for milk, obviously!), and a brown thread that I identify as “a hair”. I’ve placed evidence markers on each piece and let the kids look, but don’t touch!

At each of their stations, I place a piece of craft paper for them to work over (easy cleanup!), an empty smooth-sided plastic cup I’ve carefully touched with my fingers, gloves, a fingerprint comparison sheet (I’ve attached mine, but you’ll need to make your own), a worksheet and pen, and a notecard, but you could use hinge lifters. I also like to pre-cut tape and have it at my table so I can quickly grab a piece for quick lifting without having to fumble around with it.

Slide 1 is on the board

The kids get seated and I tell them my whole spill about who I am and what I do. I talk about how evidence is like pieces of a big puzzle, but sometimes we have to look really hard for all of the pieces. I like to engage with the kids and ask them “has anyone ever told you that you’re too nosey? That you ask too many questions? Maybe you’ve been told you’re always snooping around? That was the story of my life, which is why I became a crime scene investigator!”

Then I set up my story: “Now today, I worked really hard on baking some delicious cookies so you all could come in here and we could have a nice treat after lunch. However, while you were at lunch, someone came in here and stole all of our cookies! But the suspect has left evidence all over and I think with your help, we can solve this case together!”

Slide 2

We have a briefing of what we know happened, and what we need to do.

Slide 3

I ask the children about examples of evidence, and what can be evidence. I also like to talk about why some things they may not think of might be evidence, such as receipts with dates, times, names, etc, or tools and how they might leave impressions, and why we look for those things.

Slide 4

I always like to introduce our eyewitness as our secretary because the kids have usually met her earlier in the day. This just helps draw a personal connection. I read off her statement and then ask the students if they heard anything important in her statement.

Slide 5

“Our amazing officers have already canvased the area and located 5 possible suspects and brought them in for questioning. They’ve all given us statements, and they’ve voluntarily given us their fingerprints! Maybe we can find some fingerprints to compare these to and find out who our cookie thief really is!”

Now I go through each of my suspects, read their statements, and ask on each one “does anyone have anything to say about suspect #X?”

Suspect 1 – This is the cookie thief. I like to see if anyone points out that he specifically said chocolate chip cookies when it wasn’t mentioned. He fits the description.

Suspect 2 – He’s got the right clothing description, but he’s bald. I don’t usually point out the “hair” at the evidence table. I like one of the kids to find it and make a big deal out of them finding evidence I didn’t see, but if no one points it out, they’ll usually point out that he’s too short. This is when I like to ask the kids how tall I am and let them make their wild guesses and point out that they’ve all guessed differently, so maybe an eyewitness might have gotten it wrong, which is why we rely on our evidence. They also like to point out that his sweater is dark blue, and I like to remind them that dark blue (or gray or purple or brown) might look black, and that people might perceive colors differently based on circumstance, or might not even remember correctly at all.

Suspect 3 – He fits the description, but then I like to point out that he’s got a great alibi. We talk about what an alibi is and how we could use evidence like videos, receipts, and witnesses to back up his claims.

Suspect 4 – He doesn’t fit the description, but the kids always like to point out “If he was out of town, how did officers find him in the area?”

Suspect 5 – They always like to say “What if he’s just saying he made the cookies so he can keep them!” So once again, we just talk about how we could back up what he’s saying by looking for evidence. He might have something in his trash like broken eggs or a cookie dough wrapper, or his oven might still be warm.

Slide 11

Tell them about the patterns, and I ask them to look at the suspect fingerprints and see if they can point out a loop, arch, or whorl in them. This helps us all be on the same page.

Then I like to demonstrate fingerprinting with my “magic wand” magnetic wand, and powder. Show them how to do it and THEN I hand out their bowls with a tiny bit of powder and their wand (because I’ve learned my lesson on giving kids the tools early and I don’t want you to suffer the same way I have)

When they get a good print, I have them hold their cups while I lift the print and put it on their notecard, and then I allow them to examine the prints they lifted and compare them to the ones on the page I provided. I give them a few minutes to work with a partner and ask if anyone has found that they think match.

Slide 12

I go down the list “who thinks it’s suspect #X?” and let one or two kids give me their reasoning. I get to the end and if they aren’t all on board with suspect #1, I’ll try to backtrack them back to him through the

hair (if they didn't find it) the description, and quickly look at the prints and say "I see a matching loop!" or whatever, to get them all together.

Slide 13

The kids all feel like they've just won the lottery, and I signal the officer to go grab the cookies

Slide 14

Fin

I wrap this class up in one hour, but you could get more detailed and make it longer or change it up however it best fits your needs!