

The Big Sort

KIDS HANDS-ON

RUN AT 9:45

30 MIN

The point

A category is things that belong together — and the same pile sorts many right ways, depending on the attribute you notice.

Materials

- The oration's dumped junk-drawer pile
- Sorting/counting objects set, poured in
- Muffin tins / small sorting bowls (one per child)
- Blank floor label cards + chunky marker
- Worksheet FRONT (sorting mat) + pencils

Steps

- 1 Say only: **"put together what belongs together"** — then stay quiet and let them start.
- 2 As piles form, ask each child **WHY** — then letter a **label card** for each named category.
- 3 Walk the finished sort like a museum; **count each category aloud** and tally on the worksheet.
- 4 **Mix everything back into one pile** (let the gasp happen).
- 5 "Now sort it a **different** way." Offer attributes only if stuck: color? size? use? material?
- 6 Name the word: the **attribute** is the thing you notice — change it, and the groups change.
- 7 Each child records their favorite sort on the **worksheet mat** and finishes "my categories are ... because ...".

Say: "Was the first way right? Was the second way right? BOTH were — the things never changed, only the thing we noticed. We pick the sorting that suits our purpose."

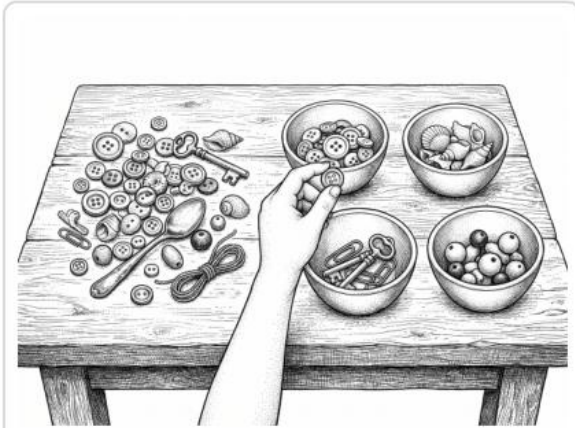


Fig. 1 — the same jumble, one bowl per category

TEACHER PREP — THE NIGHT BEFORE

Load the junk-drawer tray out of the kids' sight (varied: pencils, clips, coins, buttons, string, spoon, toy bits). Stage tins, bowls, blank cards, marker.

What to watch for

- Different kids inventing **different correct schemes**
- A "fits nowhere" pile forming — celebrate it, that IS a category
- Arguments about where one thing goes — that's the thinking, let it run

EXPECTED RESULT

Every sort "works." The pile re-sorts completely when the attribute changes — **the rule lives in the sorter, not in the stuff.**