

# The Explanation Game

Name it

Name a feature or aspect of the object that you notice.

Explain it

What could it be? What role or function might it serve? Why might it be there?

Give reasons

What makes you say that? Or why do you think it happened that way?

Generate alternatives

What else could it be? And what makes you say that?

purpose

This routine to get students to look closely at features and details of an object or occurrence and then generate multiple explanations for why something is the way it is.

Introducing  
& Exploring  
Ideas

## PURPOSE

### *What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?*

This routine involves looking closely and building explanations and interpretations. Learners may already know what they are looking at but still not fully understand how it operates, functions, or is placed. Learners are generally focusing more on the parts than the whole in using this routine.

## APPLICATION

### *When and where can it be used?*

Use this routine:

- To explore scientific objects or phenomenon, e.g. the light bulb
- To explore historical or geographical concepts, e.g. government.
- To examine mathematical models.

## ASSESSMENT

### *How can I use this routine as an assessment?*

Listen for explanations given by students & take note of the quality of their theories rather than correctness:

- Do they state the obvious or do you hear them probing beneath the surface, stretching for connections & possible relationships?
- Do explanations seem broad, overly broad or are they rich in detail, descriptive, evocative?
- Do explanations capture important characteristics, themes, elements?

## LAUNCH

### *What are the steps needed for starting and using this routine?*

1. **Set up** → Draw students' attention to an object you would like them to understand better. Invite them to look carefully at the object to see all that they can possibly see, so that they may begin speculating as to how different features are related to one another.
2. **Name It** → Ask students to share with a partner or small group various features or aspects of the object they notice. Record all the different parts they are observing.
3. **Explain It** → Ask students to begin explaining the features. Focus attention on the action of generating explanations, stating that in this step their goal is to come up with as many different explanations as possible. Document explanations.
4. **Give Reasons** → Ask students to generate reasons why their explanation is plausible. This step is about pressing for evidence. What have you seen that make you say that?
5. **Generate Alternatives** → Ask students to press for alternative explanations than the initial ones. The goal here is to keep attention on relationship between the features & why they are that way.

Adapted by Alice Vigors 2017