

# Sorting objects activity

## Purpose

For students to sort ideas, create categories, and express a rationale towards building paragraphs and a structure. This activity builds community, comfort, and connection in preparation for the sharing of real writing (which is often a practice that makes students feel vulnerable).

## Materials

Bags of random objects for each group/pair of students. Each bag should have similar objects to enable comparison across groups after the activity. For example, each bag in a session contained a round chocolate, a stone, a square magnet, a stick, a tea bag, a clip, a straw, a plastic insect, a fruit/potato, a mint candy, sticky tape on a round roll, and a plastic fork.



## Process

1. Introduce the sorting activity by explaining to students that there is much more to writing than actual writing. Much of the work happens before writing when we are conceptually arranging and re-arranging ideas and themes together in order to weave them in writing.
2. Invite students to form pairs or small groups of three. Provide one bag of objects per group.
3. Instruct students to empty the bag on the table to analyze the objects. The goal is for students to organize the materials into 3 categories. It doesn't matter what the 3 groups consist of but the members of the group should together decide how they are organized into categories. If necessary, two items don't have to be grouped.
4. Once students are done forming categories, they should rank them. For their grouping and ranking, students should agree upon and articulate a strong rationale for their choices.
5. Invite students to walk around class to hear about other groups' categories and rankings.
6. Once done, bring the class back together for students to present their groupings to each other and articulate their rationale.

## Discussion points

- Everyone thinks differently.
- There is more than one right answer. There are many ways to organize the objects and this work is interpretive.
- What are the assumptions that make us consider a category a strong category? What is weak category (e.g. random category)?
- Why does the rationale for the category help "hold it together"?
- What informed your ways of categorizing objects?
- How can you transfer the skills learned in this activity to writing paragraphs?