

Estimation Jar Challenge

Grades 3–5 • 10 min + a few days of guessing • 1+ students

WHAT YOU NEED

- A clear jar or container, a bag of small uniform objects (buttons, dried beans, paperclips)

SETUP

Fill the jar ahead of time and know the exact count. Leave it somewhere visible for a few days before the reveal.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Show the jar to the class and have each student write down a silent guess (no talking to classmates first) on a slip of paper.
2. Leave the jar out for a few days so kids can look closely, then let them submit one final revised guess.
3. On reveal day, count the contents together as a class (or in small groups with a portion each) to get the real total.
4. Discuss as a class: what strategies got people closer — estimating layers, counting a small section and multiplying, guessing based on jar size?

VARIATIONS

- Turn the reveal into the estimation lesson itself: teach "count a known fraction of the jar, then multiply" as an explicit strategy afterward.
- Run it as a recurring monthly activity with a different object and jar size each time.