

Human Sorting Machine

Grades 3–5 • 15 min • 10–30 students

WHAT YOU NEED

- None, or index cards with a trait written on each (birth month, favorite season, shoe color)

SETUP

Decide a sorting rule ahead of time (e.g. "sort by number of letters in your first name") — keep it secret from the class at first.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Without stating the rule, start moving a few students into two or three groups based on your secret rule, narrating only "this is where you go" as you place them.
2. Ask the rest of the class to guess the sorting rule by watching where students land, then test their guess by placing the next student themselves.
3. Once the rule is guessed correctly, reveal it and sort everyone officially.
4. Discuss: this is exactly what scientists do when they classify living things or materials — find the shared trait that explains the groups.

VARIATIONS

- Use a two-trait rule (a simple Venn-diagram style sort) for a more advanced round.
- Let a student who's figured out the rule take over sorting the rest of the class.