

## **How to make a riddle – step by step:**

### **1. START WITH AN ANSWER**

To make a riddle, start with an answer in order to create a question around it. Riddles can be about anything you want, but try to avoid abstract topics or topics that require specific knowledge (unless you are using your riddle for specific audiences). For starter, determine a simple subject that you will be describing like:

- **Physical things** - chair, pen, window, scissors etc.
- **Natural phenomena** - wind, rain, snow, sun etc.
- **Animal** – snake, duck, elephant etc.
- **Action** – running, writing, sleeping etc.
- **Profession** – teacher, chimney-sweeper, ballet dancer etc.

### **2. BRAINSTORM YOUR ANSWER**

Let's say your subject is a candle and in order to describe it, you need to think of the elements that are characteristic for a candle alone. Start a brainstorming sessions by writing a mental map that describes your subject from various different angles:

- **Physical appearance (adjectives)** – long, thin, white etc.
- **For what do we use it** - for romance, for lighting, for birthdays etc.
- **Where do we put it** – on cake, on chandelier (in the past), on coronet etc.
- **How do we put out the flame** – blowing, with water, covering it etc.
- **What is it made of** – wax, ignitable wick, flammable solid substance etc.
- **Experiencing with a senses** - crackling sound, burning smell, bright light, sticky etc.
- **Special characteristic** – longer it burns shorter it gets, from a solid state it turns in a liquid wax, if it gets cold it turns solid again etc.
- **Verbs** – burns, sticks, melts etc.

Depending on your subject, you can explore it with different kind of questions: where does it live, what does it eat, where do we keep it, when does it appear etc.

### 3. CHOOSING THE STYLE

Once you explored your subject, decide what kind of style do you want to use in terms of a short/long, poem/story, rhymes/prose, just one question or maybe story in rhymes. Rhymes are very popular in riddle, considering a fact that riddles originate from oral literature and it was easier to remember them using the set up rhythm. Children are also big fans of rhymes as they help them remember and concentrate on meaning of words. So for our example we will use the short poem with rhymes.

### 4. PLAYING WITH MENTAL MAP

Consider all of the facts that you wrote in the mental map, now choose the most interesting ones that you want to use, like: *longer it burns shorter it gets, crackling sound, burning smell, we use it for the birthdays, melts* etc.

Start with a simple question/tasks and work your way to more complicated ones.

**a) Describe a candle using the adjectives we wrote in our mental map.**

*It's long, thin and white.*

**b) For what do we use it?**

*We use it for light.*

Combine these answers and you already have a simple riddle. When you have mental map in front of you, look for the words that already rhyme.

But you need to be sure that it refers only to a candle, as for this riddle the answer could be the lighthouse as well. Also, most candles are white but they do come in different colors. So we need to be more specific and go back to our mental map and if needed, use some extra questions.

**c) What are special characteristic?**

*Longer it burns, shorter it gets*

**d) Why?**

*Cause it melts.*

You can stylize the answers to get a better rhythm:

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*It's long, thin and white,  
We use it for light.  
Longer it burns, shorter it gets.  
Wonder why? Couse it melts!*

In this riddle you also got a sort of paradox – *longer it burns, shorter it gets* - which is very common for a riddle but we don't notice it in everyday life as we don't think about our subject in that way. Also, this sentence alone could be the riddle if you just use the question mark at the end (assuming that nothing else get shorter as it burns – what do you think, does it?)

### 5. PLAYING WITH QUESTIONS AND FIGURES OF SPEECH

Now we need to use our imagination and start thinking in metaphors, paradoxes, alliteration and associations.

To spice things up you can always use personification (it's very common in riddles and it will help the students to think about the subject as it was alive).

Use the same adjectives and ask the following question (write the answers, you can create new mental map):

#### e) **If candle was a person how would it look like?**

Let say you get an answer like – it would be a girl, dressed in a white dress, long and thin with a burning red hair or a red nose.

#### f) **What kind of person would it be and why?**

She is cheerful and happy – because anywhere she goes she lights up the room.

Or you can use imagination and association:

#### g) **If the candle was an animal, what animal would it be and why?**

Dragon – because of the fire, giraffe – because of the long neck

#### h) **If a candle could speak, what sounds would it make?**

Crunch and crack

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### i) Does she have some kind of superpower?

Yes, she can melt – become liquid and then go back to being solid again.

As students start to perceived candle in a different context, they start to experience it differently. Allow the students to answer freely to these question, and let them explain their associations and metaphors – do not correct them, as there are no correct answers, it is their personal perception of the subject. Working in a group while using associations and metaphors, students have a chance to experience others people perception of the subject.

Once they thought about the candle through these questions, ask them if they have any additional questions or ideas how we could experience the candle. If yes, write them down.

Now we need to decide which metaphors we want to use and do we want to use them in first person or in third person . For making a riddle in rhymes, look for the words that rhyme in your mental map.

For example: in our map we have crack and neck, so we put them together:

You can hear crunch and crack,

Simmering from her long neck.

This again could have multiple answers, like – match.

You can also specify riddles subject by giving an answers on what the subject is not and mix first and third person:

You can hear crunch and crack,

Simmering from her long neck.

*While waiting your answer to hatch,*

*Remember, I am not a match*

*Or anything made out of branch.*

If we really see our candle as a dragon, why don't we add her superpowers to that:

With a dragon breath,

She makes herself melt.

## How to make a riddle?

Making riddles excesses our creative thinking in a way that we are exploring existing concepts as we are finding a problem around its meaning while we are questioning it. Holistic experience of a subject allows us to experience it in a different way. Also, we need to find what characteristic are specific/unique for each subject. As we said it at the beginning, you can make a riddle about anything, so creative thinking/riddle making is a great method for any subject from math and history to art and literature.

Share with us some of your own riddles!