

What Else Could It Be?

Use this tool when children need a nudge towards uprooting assumptions and transitioning to a more open mindset.

Step 1: Introduce and play What Else Could It Be?

Show children a familiar photograph, drawing, or object. For example, you could draw a circle and ask children, "What do you see?" "What does it make you think of?" After collecting several responses, playfully tell the children, "This isn't a circle!" Invite them to play with ideas by starting with your own alternative interpretations, e.g., "It's...[insert a different interpretation such as a ring, an eye of a hurricane, etc.]" This hints that the item is not just what children see or use everyday; it can also be something new or different.

Encourage children to see the image or object in another way by repeatedly asking, "What else could it be?" Honor all answers, highlighting connections and differences. For example, "I notice you both saw a hula-hoop." OR "I notice one of you saw a hula hoop, but you saw a soccer ball... It's interesting that you saw different things in this one object. You see a planet. What else could it be?"

Step 2: Reflect

After playing the game, ask children one or more of the following questions:

- What did you notice?
- What did you wonder?
- Did we miss anything?
- Did this spark any ideas for you? How was your thinking sparked by others?
- Did your thinking about ____ shift? If so, how?
- Where did we start? Do you still see ____ when you look at it? How did your ideas grow over the course of the game?
- Why do you think different people imagined different things in the same image/object?
- What does this experience show about how imagination works?

The most important question to discuss and revisit from time to time is, "Why do you think different people imagined different things in the same image/object?"

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Children benefit from looking beyond the “right” answer to predict many possibilities.

Inventors ask big questions that normalize uncertainty. They do not just see the world as it is; they re-imagine the world as it might exist. Inventors have a “maker” or “open” mindset; they are comfortable with complexity, not just with finding a single, simple solution. Becoming comfortable with uncertainty is a skill that can be practiced and reflected on throughout one’s life. Schools that support invention invite children’s (and teachers’) imaginations and divergent thinking. *What Else Could It Be?* is a simple game that activates certainty and then playfully invites its disruption. Playfulness is a highly effective means to practice feeling comfortable with otherwise risky or uncomfortable habits of engagement.



Suggested Time Frame

15-20 minutes

When and How

Play this game when you think children’s fixed ideas are getting in the way of imagining possibilities or finding value in multiple perspectives.

Tips and Variations

- This game can be played in large or small groups, or with individual children.
- This game is appropriate for children in preschool through 5th grade.

For inspiration, read aloud books such as:

- *The Extraordinary Egg* by Leo Lionni Young
- *Fortunately* by Remy Charlip
- *Look books* by Tana Hoban
- *Most Magnificent Thing* by Ashley Spires
- *Not a Box and Not a Stick* by Antoinette Portis
- *Sam and Dave Dig a Hole* by Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen
- *Zoom* by Istvan Banyai

For video examples and reflections on practices that inspire inventiveness, become an Opal School Online Sustaining Member at learning.opalschool.org.

