

# The Mystery Rule

Players 2-4    Ages 5+    10-15 min

## GOAL

Children determine the common attribute, or characteristic, among a set of items.

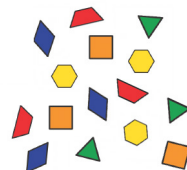
## MATERIALS



Nature items



Counter sets



Pattern Block cutouts



Clothing items

## VOCABULARY

Same (in common)

Different

Sorting rule

## QUESTIONS

How did you figure out what the sorting rule was?

What did you look at and notice?

What did you think about?

## HOW TO PLAY

1. Choose a collection of items, and think about how you would like to sort them. Sorting means to separate into groups. You could sort by attributes, such as size, color, and shape, or by how an item is used.




2. Then, put all the items that follow your rule in one group, and all the items that don't follow your rule in another group.



3. Start your turn by saying, "I used a mystery sorting rule to sort these items from the rest of the pile. Can you look at the items and tell me what my sorting rule was? What do all of these items have in common? What is the same about these items?"

Some children may be able to tell what the sorting rule is right away ("You took out all the orange"). You can respond by saying, "Yes, I made a group of all the orange laundry!"

Others may need more time and experience. Ask questions to direct children's attention to the sorting rule.

-  "Are these items the same size or different sizes?"  
"Are they the same color?"  
"Are these all the same type of laundry item?"

4. Discuss with children how they figured out the rule. Don't be surprised if they come up with a different rule than you thought of. It's exciting to talk about how more than one rule can be true.
5. When you're ready, play again, or this time have the children choose their own mystery sorting rule for others to solve.

## WHAT CHILDREN ARE LEARNING

- Many young children love to sort and organize groups of objects. This process of sorting, or classification, is an important practice in science and mathematics. Activities like this help children focus on the attributes of objects and think about what makes things the same and different.
- To solve the mystery sorting rule, children need to ignore the differences between the items in the set (e.g., that the orange laundry includes different clothing items) in order to determine what the items have in common (they are all orange). This helps children develop both their sorting skills and their attention-shifting skills.

## MATH TOPICS

Data Collection and Analysis

Sorting and Attributes

Shapes and Geometry

## VIDEO



### Watch Game Video

View the QR code in your smartphone's camera app or QR code reader to watch a video that shows how to play *The Mystery Rule*.