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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Designing Escape Room Learning Labs

Escape Room Learning Labs



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Goals and Objectives

Goals

The goal is to transform ELA instruction into dynamic, standard-aligned escape room experiences that make everyday lessons more engaging, interactive, and meaningful for students. By using fun challenges and puzzles, students will work together, think critically, and practice important reading skills in a way that feels like a game. These activities are designed to build collaboration, confidence, and deeper understanding— all while keeping learning joyful and meaningful.

Objectives

Participants will

- Design curriculum-based escape rooms using classroom materials.
- Develop differentiated puzzles for diverse learners.
- Integrate vocabulary, comprehension, and math reasoning.
- Facilitate collaborative student experiences with academic outcomes.

Florida Standards

- ELA.3.R.1.1 – Explain the development of stated or implied theme(s) throughout a literary text.
- ELA.4.V.1.3 – Use context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the meaning of multiple-meaning and unknown words and phrases.
- ELA.5.R.3.2 – Summarize a text to enhance comprehension. Include central ideas and relevant details.
- MA.3.AR.1.2 – Solve one- and two-step real-world problems using operations with whole numbers.
- MA.4.M.1.1 – Select and use appropriate tools to measure attributes of objects.

Course Overview

Escape Room Learning Labs is a hands-on, interactive session where participants will explore how to transform traditional ELA instruction into engaging academic escape room activities. This presentation is designed for individual educators or small groups of 2–5 participants and can be completed within a one-hour professional development session.

To begin, participants will be introduced to the structure and purpose of classroom escape rooms and how they support collaboration, critical thinking, and standards-based learning. A sample escape room challenge will be demonstrated using ELA-aligned clues, puzzles, and reading tasks. Participants will then work in small groups to complete the sample activity as students would, identifying how the components reinforce comprehension and vocabulary skills.

After completing the activity, groups will reflect on their experience and share takeaways. The session will then shift into a planning segment where educators receive templates and guidance to begin designing their own escape room. Attendees will outline a simple challenge using their grade-level standards and brainstorm how to differentiate tasks for diverse learners, including ELLs and students needing enrichment or support.

The session concludes with practical tips for implementation, time management, and student facilitation. All participants will leave with a planning template, activity ideas, and low-prep strategies they can use immediately in their classrooms.

Sample Lesson Plan

Please feel free to tailor this broad lesson plan to fit individual needs and student populations.

Title: Unlocking Vocabulary: A Classroom Escape Room Challenge

Grade Level: Upper Elementary (Grades 3–5)

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Objective:

Students will use reading comprehension and context clue strategies to define key vocabulary terms and unlock clues in an academic escape room activity aligned to ELA standards. Students will collaborate, think critically, and apply their knowledge to solve a series of challenges that lead to a final “escape.”

Materials:

- Escape Room Planning Sheet (for teacher setup)
 - Clue Card Template (with vocabulary clues)
 - Pre-selected vocabulary words from current unit or text
 - Answer Key Sheet
 - Envelopes or folders for each “challenge”
 - Student Team Tracker
 - Reflection Card (one per student)
 - Timer, pencils, optional props or classroom decor for theme
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Lesson Outline:

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Set the Scene:** Introduce the escape room scenario (e.g., “Your team is locked in the Vocabulary Vault! You must decode the meaning of each word to find your way out.”)
- **Objective Explanation:** Let students know they’ll be solving vocabulary challenges using clues and teamwork.
- **Group Formation:** Divide students into small groups of 3–5. Assign roles if desired (e.g., clue reader, recorder, decoder).

2. Challenge Overview & Setup (5–10 minutes)

- **Instructions:** Explain how the escape room works. Each group will complete 3–5 vocabulary-based tasks. Once a task is solved, they receive the next clue.
 - **Model an Example:** Demonstrate how to solve one vocabulary clue using context clues from a sample passage.
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3. Escape Room Game Play (25–30 minutes)

- **Challenge 1:** Match vocabulary words with correct definitions using clues in short passages.
 - **Challenge 2:** Use context clues to unlock the correct code (e.g., circle the correct synonym or antonym that leads to a number or letter).
 - **Challenge 3:** Unscramble vocabulary puzzles or complete a fill-in-the-blank challenge with target words.
 - **Track Progress:** Use the Student Team Tracker to log completed clues and monitor which teams are making progress.
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4. Reflection & Discussion (10–15 minutes)

- **Group Reflection:** After escaping, students discuss the clues they solved and how vocabulary knowledge helped them.
 - **Class Debrief:** Facilitate a brief discussion on which clues were most challenging, and how students worked through them.
 - **Individual Reflection:** Students complete the Reflection Card, noting what they learned and how the activity helped them understand vocabulary in a new way.
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Assessment:

- **Observation:** Monitor group collaboration, problem-solving, and vocabulary application.
- **Answer Key Sheet:** Use to quickly check each group's solutions.
- **Reflection Cards:** Review for personal understanding, vocabulary growth, and feedback.
- **Student Team Tracker:** Evaluate participation and completion of tasks.

This lesson combines standards-based instruction with interactive gameplay to reinforce vocabulary, critical thinking, & collaborative learning.

Step-by-Step Implementation Guide

1. Choose a Focus Standard
2. Build the Storyline
3. Design Clues
4. Group Students
5. Set Rules & Time Limit
6. Facilitate & Support
7. Celebrate Escapes!



Example: Escape Room Activity

Reading Passage: The Great Pencil Mystery

This morning, something strange happened in Mrs. Harper's class. As students sat down to begin their writing assignment, hands shot up all over the room.

"Mrs. Harper, I don't have a pencil!" said Jalen.

"Mine's gone too!" added Zoe.

In fact, every student's pencil had disappeared—even the extras in the supply bin were missing. Mrs. Harper opened her desk drawer to grab a backup, but even her favorite red pencil was nowhere to be found.

"Is this a prank?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

The class searched the room from corner to corner. They looked in desks, cubbies, under rugs, and even behind the globe. Nothing. That's when Marcus noticed something odd near the pencil sharpener—a small trail of pencil shavings leading to the window.

"Look!" he shouted. "The trail goes outside!"

The class rushed to the window. Sure enough, the pencil shaving trail continued along the sidewalk toward the school garden. Curious, they followed it past the playground until they reached a tall tree. High in the branches, nestled in a nook, was a squirrel's nest—and sticking out of it were several brightly colored pencils.

The class gasped. A squirrel had stolen the pencils and used them to build its nest!

The students laughed, and even Mrs. Harper chuckled. "Well," she said, "I guess we need to keep the windows closed—and maybe give that squirrel its own pencil box."

Escape Room Challenge: Main Idea Mystery

What is the main idea of the passage?

- A. The students couldn't find their pencils and blamed each other.
- B. The class followed a trail of pencil shavings that led to a squirrel's nest.
- C. A squirrel took all the class's pencils and used them to build a nest.
- D. Marcus forgot his pencil and asked to borrow one from his teacher.

Write your answer: _____



Riddle Challenge: Unlock the Code

The thief was quick and clever, but not from the class.

It used what it stole to make a home fast.

It wasn't a teacher, a student, or pet—

What furry suspect did the class soon get?

Your Answer: _____

If your answer is *squirrel*, your code is: 4

(The answer can pre-write the code on the back of the riddle or inside a "clue envelope.")

Student Reflection

1. Which clue was the trickiest for you to figure out?
2. How did you and your teammates help each other?
3. What new word or reading skill did you practice today?
4. What did you do when you got stuck on a clue?
5. How did this game help you become a better reader?



Online Escape Room Games:

<https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/activities/escape-room-activity?theme=base>

<https://playpuzzlepunks.com/?srsltid=AfmBOoqnKYiHoj8tD9fCvWcq5ZkklhHfoF4G9W YKMYDRqBr fYYuh9s>