

Unlocking Knowledge: Investigating Letterlocking Through Questioning

In this lesson, students will discover the purpose of writing letters in the past and how the technique of letterlocking was used to keep mail secure.

Grade: 3		Subject: ELA
Focus Standard(s)	3RI: Develop and answer questions to locate relevant and specific details in a text to support an answer or inference.	
Learning Objective	Students will be able to ask and answer questions to locate specific details in the text.	
Materials/Resources	Unlocking a Secret Letter! Accompanying questions	
Vocabulary	Compromised: damaged; ruined; virtually: done on a computer	
Essential Questions(s)	Why did people write letters long ago? Is letter writing still important today?	
Anticipatory Set	Begin by asking students how people communicated in the past when there were no phones or internet.	
Mini-lesson/Guided Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the students to letterlocking and explain why this technique was used years ago. Show the accompanying Slide Show images from the article to help explain the process. • Next, have students work with a partner to answer the accompanying questions as they read the article. They can use the highlighting tool to find text evidence to support their answers. 	
Independent Practice	After students answer the questions, have them get creative by folding their answered questions to create their own letterlocked note. Students can watch the video to learn one way to fold a letter using the letterlocking technique. Students will then exchange their notes with other students in the class without unfolding them.	
Closure	Discuss the experience: How did it feel to receive a locked letter? What might be the benefits of letterlocking in the past? Do we still need to use letterlocking today? Why or why not?	
Differentiation	Adjust lexile® levels as needed; answer questions as a whole group; use accessibility features or read-to-me feature as needed; print copies of article	

Name: _____

Article: “Unlocking a Secret Letter!”

Directions: Answer the questions. Then secure your letter using letterlocking.

Question 1: Why did people use letterlocking?

Answer: _____

Question 2: How did the MIT team unlock the letter without opening it?

Answer: _____

Question 3: What information did they find inside the letter?

Answer: _____

Question 4: Why did Jacques write the letter to his cousin and what happened to the letter?

Answer: _____

Answer Key

Article: “Unlocking a Secret Letter!”

Directions: Answer the questions. Then secure your letter using letterlocking.

Question 1: Why did people use letterlocking?

Answer: People did not have envelopes, so they would use letterlocking to keep their mail private and secure.

Question 2: How did the MIT team unlock the letter without opening it?

Answer: They use an X-ray scanner to virtually unfold the letter and make an image of what the letter would look like if it were opened.

Question 3: What information did they find inside the letter?

Answer: They found words written by Jacques Sennacques.

Question 4: Why did Jacques write the letter to his cousin and what happened to the letter?

Answer: He wrote a letter to his cousin about “following up about legal documents”, but his cousin never received the letter.