LA COUNTY LIBRARY

Activity Idea

Make Your Own Secret Code

Letter Shifting

Recommended for Ages 8 +

What you will need
A piece of paper
Something to write with

How is it done
There are many ways to make secret codes. Today, we will learn about letter shifting. Letter shifting is when you replace the letters in a word with different letters. The letters you use to replace the original have to follow some rules.

First, you must decide how many letters you are going to shift. For example, if you chose to shift the letters one time, then the letter “A” becomes the letter “B” instead, because you are shifting one letter over. If you run out of alphabet, start back at “A”. Using this code, if you had a word with “Z” you would replace it with the letter “A”. So, if you want to write a word, you will shift for each letter. Using the shift one letter model described here, if you want to write the word “toy” shifting each letter by one you get the code word “vpz”.

Let us try this on the following sentence.

The dog ran home.

Now, if we shift every letter by 1 to the next letter in the alphabet, the sentence will look like this:

Uif eph sbo ipnf.

That sentence just looks like a bunch of letters and does not make much sense. But YOU know that if you took each letter and changed it with the letter that comes before it in the alphabet, you would end up with the original message! A secret code is born!

Shifting the letters by one is the easiest way to make a secret code, but it is also the easiest one to figure out. If you want to make it harder to figure out, you can shift the letters more forward or backward as long as all the letters are shifted the same amount.

One more thing you will need to make the secret code work is a code key. A code key is something that explains the code. You and the person you want to read the message both need a code key so you can both read the messages. Below is a code key for shifting the letters by one. There are also some blank ones you can use if you want to make a letter shifting code where you shift letters by more than one. Now you can make your own secret messages.

Have fun!

Code	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
Alphabet	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Code	*J*	*K*	*L*	*M*	*N*	*O*	*P*	*Q*
Alphabet	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Code	*R*	*S*	*T*	*U*	*V*	*W*	*X*	*Y*
Alphabet	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
Code	*Z*	*A*						
Alphabet	Y	Z						

Code	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*G*	*H*	*I*
Alphabet	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Code	*J*	*K*	*L*	*M*	*N*	*O*	*P*	*Q*
Alphabet	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Code	*R*	*S*	*T*	*U*	*V*	*W*	*X*	*Y*
Alphabet	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
Code	*Z*	*A*						
Alphabet	Y	Z						

Here are a set of code keys with the code not filled in so you can make your own.

Code								
Alphabet	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Code								
Alphabet	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Code								
Alphabet	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
Code								
Alphabet	Y	Z						

Code								
Alphabet	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Code								
Alphabet	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Code								
Alphabet	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X
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