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THE MYSTERIOUS MAP

A short story for
learning to learn



The Mysterious Map

- **Theme:** Strategic thinking and learning from experience
- **Reading time:** 20 minutes
- **Level:** 8-12 years old

SUMMARY

Olivia, Max and Sara are three friends who dream of adventure. When they find an old map in the attic of the Riverview Leisure Centre, they embark on a treasure hunt full of riddles and challenges. To succeed, they must utilise memorisation and problem-solving strategies. Along the way, they learn to observe, break down problems into manageable steps, and structure their thoughts before taking action.

KEYWORDS

observation, strategy, problem-solving, perseverance, memory

Chapter 1: A Glowing Secret

The sun was setting over Riverview, casting long shadows on the cobbled streets. At the centre of the small town, nestled between a bakery that smelled of freshly baked bread and a bookshop filled with dusty old books, stood the Riverview Leisure Centre. After school, children gathered there to play, learn, and, sometimes, prepare for their next great adventure.

Today, a special kind of excitement crackled in the air. Olivia, a curious girl with a head full of curls and a mind that never rested, had stumbled upon something unusual in the attic of the leisure centre—a dusty old map. Strange symbols covered its surface, and faint, shimmering lines ran across it as if whispering secrets from another time.

Olivia raced downstairs, her heart thudding with excitement. Clutching the map, she burst into the room where her friends were waiting – Max, a quiet boy with a talent for riddles, and Sara, with an imagination as big as the sky. They quickly gathered around the wooden table where Olivia spread out the map, the paper cracking under her fingers. As they smoothed it out, a shiver of excitement ran through them as if the map itself held a secret waiting to be discovered.

Max squinted, deep in thought, ‘This doesn't look like any map of Riverview,’ he murmured. ‘Where do you think it leads to?’

Sara pointed to a spot on the map that glowed slightly. ‘Maybe it's a treasure map!’ she exclaimed, her eyes wide with wonder. ‘Imagine what amazing secrets we might uncover!’ she added excitedly.

Olivia took a deep breath, recalling something her teacher taught her: **when facing a big problem, break it down into smaller pieces**. ‘Let’s make a plan,’ she suggested. ‘We’ll list what we know and what we don’t know about this map.’

Max took out his notebook, ready to jot down clues or ideas. As the group tried to make sense of the symbols, Olivia noticed that her thoughts were wandering. She pulled herself together - realising that she wasn't concentrating enough on the task at hand. She closed her eyes for a moment, took a deep breath and refocused.

Max began to write:

- What we know:

- ✓ It's an old map
- ✓ It's not of Riverview
- ✓ It has shiny symbols

- What we don't know:

- ✗ Where it leads to
- ✗ What the symbols mean
- ✗ How to read them

Sara, who was better at imagining stories than decoding them, felt a little lost but decided to try another approach. 'Why don't we make up a story about the map?' she suggested. 'It might help us to see the symbols differently.'

They each took turns to describe what they thought the map might lead to—a hidden castle, a secret library, or a garden of enchanted flowers. As they brainstormed, Olivia noticed that Max was looking at the map in a new way, his eyes scanning the surface as if something had clicked.

'I think I see something,' Max said suddenly. 'These symbols - if you look at them from a different angle, they look like letters!'

The group reorganised their ideas and, thanks to Max's observation, slowly began to decode the map. It wasn't easy, but each small success gave them more confidence. Olivia kept reminding them to stay focused, pausing now and then to ask, 'What's the next step?' or 'Are we missing something?'

Night had long since fallen when they managed to find the first clue: the letters spelt out a familiar name, “clock tower.” They exchanged glances, realising what it meant. The town’s old clock tower marked the start of a winding path that stretched deep into the forest. No one really knew where it led... but they were about to find out.

Olivia carefully refolded the map. ‘We'll meet again tomorrow after school,’ she suggested, her eyes shining with determination as she set a goal. ‘We have an adventure ahead of us.’

As the children left the leisure centre, mystery still hung in the air. They were all wondering not only about the treasure but also about the road ahead and the new ways of learning how to think.

What about you?

- Why did the friends make a list of what they knew and didn’t know? Have you used this method before?
- Do you think breaking things down helps in solving a problem?

Chapter 2: The Tower Code

The following afternoon, Olivia, Max and Sara met up in front of the old clock tower. The tall and imposing tower hadn't rung for decades. It was covered in ivy, its weathered stones giving the impression that it was guarding something long forgotten.

‘This is where the path begins’, said Olivia, pointing to a small portal at the base of the tower, hidden behind some bushes. Following the winding path from the clock tower, Olivia, Max, and Sara pressed on. The trees grew taller and denser around



them, their branches arching overhead like a tunnel. Just as they were beginning to wonder if they had taken a wrong turn, the path opened into a clearing.

In the centre stood an unusual tower. It was round, with a domed roof covered in shimmering tiles that seemed to change colour in the sunlight. Vines crawled up its stone walls, partially covering symbols that looked oddly familiar—just like the ones on the map. A heavy wooden door stood slightly ajar as if inviting them inside.

After some hesitation, they stepped forward, ready to uncover new secrets.

Inside, soft light filtered through the dusty windows, illuminating an old spiral staircase. On one wall, they noticed a metal plate engraved with strange numbers: 7, 3, 9, 1, 5.

Max furrowed his brows. ‘I think we should memorise this; it must be the code for going higher,’ he said. ‘But that’s a long sequence to hold in our minds at once.’

Sara bit her lip, worried. ‘What if we forget the order? Might we get stuck?’

Olivia remembered a memorisation technique she'd seen in class. ‘We could use mental images for each number. Turning numbers into pictures to make them easier to remember.’ She suggested that 7 resembles a grandfather's walking stick, 3 could be butterfly wings, 9 looks like a cat's tail, a wand can represent 1, and 5 reminds me of an ear.’

They laughed as they imagined these far-fetched associations but quickly adopted the idea. Max repeated the series, closing his eyes: ‘A cane, wings, a tail, a wand and an ear’.



As they climbed the spiral staircase, they reached a locked door with a number dial. Olivia, recalling their pictures, carefully turned the dial in the correct sequence. With a loud click, the door swung open to reveal a small circular room. Ancient clocks lined the walls, all frozen at different times. In the centre of the room lay another detailed map awaiting them.

‘It worked, we did it!’ exclaimed Max, impressed by the tricks and techniques.

‘Funny, I can still remember the images,’ added Sara, amazed at her memory.

They took the new map, which was slightly different from the previous one. Its lines traced a precise path leading away from the clock tower and pointed to a place labelled “Garden of Riddles”.

Their eyes were now filled with confidence. Olivia, satisfied, rolled up the map and put it back in her bag. ‘It’s late, let’s go home. Tomorrow, a new challenge awaits!’

As they left the tower, the children understood that the key to their adventure lay not only in the map but also in the new ways of learning and retaining what they discovered.

For your notebook

Write down the strategy the friends used to remember the numbers.

Chapter 3: The Garden of Riddles

The next afternoon, Olivia, Max and Sara arrived at a tall, rusty gate hidden at the back of an old park that no one frequented any more. Behind the gate lay the Garden of Riddles, a place forgotten by the people of Riverview, where nature seemed to have taken over every corner. Plants grew in disorder, and statues of fantastic creatures protruded from the thorny bushes.

Olivia carefully opened the gate, and the children entered the garden. In the centre, they found a large circle of stones, each engraved with strange words forming a complex riddle. Sara read them out loud:

**To find the way, you must remember,
Scattered words—arrange them all.
Lose your path, and all stays hidden.**

The children soon realised that if they were to move forward, they had to remember the order of the words engraved on the stones. Sara sat down and began to whisper the words to herself, but she kept mixing them.

‘We have to remember at least ten different words—and in the exact right order, too!’ said Max, a little discouraged. ‘We’re never going to make it! Can we jot it down?’

Olivia took a moment to think. ‘What if we create a story with these words? Each word could be a part of the story, like a common thread.’ Sara smiled, finding the idea perfect. ‘We could imagine that each word is an important character or object in the story!’

The three friends set about creating a wacky story in which words came to life. ‘The key opened a magical door, behind which a red dragon guarded an ancient treasure...’ Each word engraved on the stones became part of their story, making it easier and more fun to remember.

What about you?

- Why do you think turning words into a story made it easier to remember them?
- How would you use a story to remember something important?



Max closed his eyes and concentrated on the story. He visualised the scene: the key, the door, the dragon, the treasure... When he felt ready, he began to replace the words on the stones, one by one, in the correct order.

A soft clink sounded in the garden, and the stones lit up, revealing a trapdoor hidden under a carpet of dead leaves.

‘I can’t believe it worked!’ marvelled Sara. ‘Our story helped us to remember everything.’

Olivia smiled, proud of their method. ‘We used our imagination to learn. It just goes to show that even the most complicated things can become simple with a good story.’

The trapdoor opened onto a stone staircase leading down into the garden’s depths. At the base of the stairs, they found a wall covered in moss, with a faint engraving visible beneath it. Olivia brushed away the moss to reveal the words:

“To uncover the final secret, follow the path to the Forgotten Library.”

Max took careful notes, knowing that the next challenge would require even more memory and strategy. They stuck together, more motivated than ever to unlock the secrets of the map.

‘The Forgotten Library awaits us’, Max declared, looking at his friends with determination. ‘But this time, we’ll be ready for whatever challenges come our way.’

What about you?

- Think about today’s challenge. What strategy helped the friends solve the riddle?

Chapter 4: The Forgotten Library

The following afternoon, Olivia, Max and Sara arrived at the entrance of the Forgotten Library, an imposing building hidden by thick branches and roots that were entangled around the marble columns. The large doors were decorated with intricate designs and engraved with ancient symbols similar to those on the map.

As they pushed open the heavy doors, they were enveloped by the smell of old books and damp wood. Inside, gigantic shelves rose to the ceiling, filled with dusty books and yellowed parchments. In the centre of the room, a huge wooden table held an open book, which was bigger than all the others, with pages covered in golden letters.

‘This must be where it all ends,’ Olivia murmured as she approached the book. Max and Sara followed her, watching the letters sparkle faintly.

On the page, a new riddle was written:

To find the truth, three clues are hidden,

Each one holds a key to proceed.

Remember past lessons, and you can win.

The children understood that they had to find three clues scattered around the library, each containing part of the final secret. They split up to explore the shelves full of books, using the skills they had developed throughout their adventure.

Olivia wandered down a dusty aisle lined with towering shelves, her eyes scanning the spines of ancient books. She paused at a leather-bound book that seemed out of place, slightly tilted forward on the shelf. Her curiosity piqued, she pulled it down and opened it, revealing a series of complex symbols drawn on the inside cover. She knew she had to remember a series of complex symbols. Remembering the visualisation technique they’d used before, Olivia imagined each symbol as part of a scene in her head: a bird, a river, a mountain. She repeated them silently to make sure she didn’t forget anything.

On the other side of the library, Max came across a table on which lay an unfolded parchment. He realised it contained the second clue. A long series of numbers that looked important were written in neat columns. Recalling the memory trick from the clock tower, Max decided to associate each number with a mental image. Associating

each number with a familiar object or action. He said to himself: '2 is a swan, 5 is an ear...' and crafted a story. This helped him remember the numbers as a part of a sequence he could later recall.

Meanwhile, Sara noticed a large, faded mural painting on the library wall. The mural was filled with ancient words arranged in what appeared to be verses. Inspired by the storytelling technique they'd used in the Garden of Riddles, she quickly invented a tale where each word on the mural represented an essential part of her story. As she weaved the story in her mind, each word took on a new, memorable meaning, helping her to remember the sequence perfectly.

After each friend had found and memorised their clue, they gathered at the centre of the library and shared what they had learned. To piece together the final riddle, they combined symbols, numbers and words in the correct order.

A soft sound echoed in the library. The ledger on the table began to glow, and slowly, a tiny key appeared between its pages. Olivia took it, and to their surprise, a secret door opened in the wall behind them. Inside, an unexpected treasure awaited them: books filled with lost tales, ancient instruments and even more mysterious maps.

'It wasn't just an adventure to find a treasure,' Olivia realised, touching one of the precious books with her finger. 'We learned about ourselves and how to use our minds better.' Max nodded, a small smile creeping on his face, 'We've found something more important than just treasure.' Sara agreed and added with pride, 'Now we know that no matter how difficult the challenge, we can always find a way through.'

They took a few books as souvenirs of their incredible adventure. As they left the Forgotten Library, they felt stronger and more united, knowing that the real key to making progress was already within them: their ability to reflect, remember and learn from each experience.

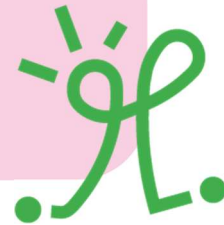
What about you?

- Can you explain the different memory tricks the friends used?
- Which one would you try if you had to remember something important?

Today, I learnt...

The children overcame the challenges by using the following:

- Strategy to organise their ideas.
- Visualisation to memorise numbers and symbols.
- Narration to make it easier to remember words.



QUIZ

Question 1

When the friends found the card, how did they go about understanding its message?

1. They immediately tried to read it without thinking.
2. They made a list of what they knew and what they didn't know.
3. They asked for help without trying themselves.
4. They guessed at random.



Each approach is a way of tackling a problem: which is closest to yours?

Question 2

When they had to memorise a sequence of numbers, what method did they use?

1. They memorised by repeating mechanically.
2. They transformed each number into a picture to help them remember it.
3. They wrote the numbers on their hands.
4. They tried to guess them.



There are different strategies for memorising: which do you think works best for you?

Question 3

When they found the mystery words in the puzzle garden, how did they remember them?

1. They tried to memorise them.
2. They incorporated them into a story to help them remember them.
3. They recited them without trying to understand their meaning.
4. They ignored the riddle and moved on without thinking.



Associating information with a story is a memorisation strategy: do you think it could help you too?

TOOLBOX

This exercise can help you in the way you learn.

We all learn in different ways.

You can download the exercise on the website of the project.

1/ Life connections

Objective: Reflection, knowledge transfer, self-regulation

At the end of the lesson, you are asked to reflect on how the day's learning connects to real life.

By thinking about where and how you can apply what you've learnt, you make meaningful links between classroom content and everyday experiences.



CogniQuest is a project created by organisations and schools from Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece and Poland.

Together, they have developed tools to help you think about your thinking. This is called metacognition - a fancy word that means “learning how to learn”.

Through these tales, you’ll discover different ways to solve problems, stay focused, and reflect on how you learn best.

Explore the whole CogniQuest collections on the website of the project:

www.cogniquet.eu



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