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THE MYSTERY OF THE VANISHING TROPHY

A short story for
learning to learn



The Mystery of the Vanishing Trophy

- **Theme:** Problem-solving strategy and critical thinking
- **Reading time:** 20 minutes
- **Level:** 8-12 years old

SUMMARY

When the football championship trophy goes missing, Max, Sara, and Olivia decide to solve the mystery. By taking a considered approach, analysing clues, and constantly adjusting their strategies, they discover not only the truth behind the theft but also the importance of organised thinking and teamwork in solving a complex problem.

KEYWORDS

analysis, observation, planning, critical thinking, problem-solving

Chapter 1: The Missing Trophy

It was a bright Monday morning in Riverview, and Oakwood Primary School buzzed with excitement. The football tournament had just ended, and for the first time in ten years, Oakwood had claimed the championship trophy. Cheers and laughter echoed through the halls as students celebrated the long-awaited victory. Max, Sara, and Olivia stood among the crowd, applauding the players who had made it happen. The entire school was filled with eager energy, waiting for the big moment when the team would proudly place the trophy in the school's glass case. Principal Greenwich stepped into his office to retrieve it, ready to begin the celebration. But when he opened the cabinet—his heart sank.

The trophy was gone!

The entire school was shocked by the news. Sara, Max and Olivia decided to meet at their usual meeting spot under the big oak tree.



‘This is so weird,’ stated Max in a distressed tone. ‘Who would do such a thing?’

Sara’s eyes sparkled with excitement, ‘It looks like we have to take action and try to solve the mystery of the missing trophy!’

Olivia nodded calmly, ‘We should start collecting clues right away.’

Without wasting a moment, the trio sprang into action, eager to solve the mystery of the vanishing trophy. Max furrowed his brow. ‘What’s the best way to start?’

Sara shrugged, ‘Maybe we should come up with a plan first?’

They all agreed—that was a great idea. Huddling together, they **outlined their strategy**. Max jotted down their steps in his notebook while Sara carefully considered each action:

1. **Start with the principal’s office.**
2. **Search for any clues.**
3. **Observe and analyse everything carefully.**

With their plan in place, the trio set off toward the principal’s office, ready to uncover the first clue in their investigation.

What about you?

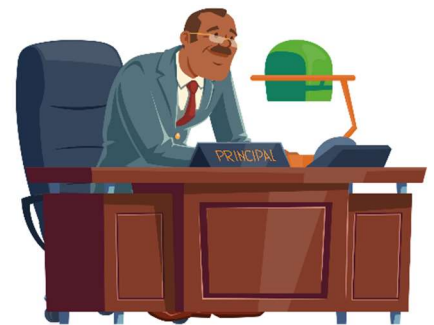
- Do you think it's helpful to make a plan before starting something? Do you usually do that?
- When working in a team, how do you all agree on the best way to do something?

Chapter 2: Clues in the Principal's Office

The trio made their way to Principal Greenwich's office. Stepping forward, Sara explained their plan to him. 'We want to start looking for clues, and we'd like to begin here. Would it be okay if we searched your office?'

Principal Greenwich, even though he looked a little uncomfortable, seemed intrigued by their determination. 'Alright,' he said, 'you can start here, but if you find anything important, please let me know.'

As soon as they entered, Max pulled out his magnifying glass and started scanning every corner of the room. 'Let's be **methodical**,' he said, pacing slowly. 'We don't want to miss anything.'



Sara pulled out her notebook and began scribbling down every detail she observed—the layout of the room, the placement of objects, even the faint spots on the carpet. Every detail could be important. Meanwhile, Olivia sat down with the principal and started questioning about the game and the trophy. Leaning forward, she asked, 'When was the last time you saw the trophy?'

'Last Friday, right after the game, I placed it in the glass case myself.' Olivia further asked, 'Was there anyone else in the office or school?'

'Only the janitor, Mr Davis. He was finishing up the cleaning shift. We both left the school premises together. I locked up and left, and everything seemed fine,' he added.

Olivia thought for a moment and asked, 'Did you notice anything unusual when you arrived this morning?'

Mr Greenwich frowned, 'Now that you mention it, I think the glass of the cabinet was ajar, and there was a smudge on the case.'

Sara vigorously noted every detail of the conversation.

Max, who was busy with the magnifying glass, spotted a faint mark on the case, and it seemed as though something had been dragged.

He excitedly called out, 'Hey, look at this!' The three of them crouched near the trophy case and examined the faint marks. Sara quickly added it to her notes. She said, 'If something was dragged, it could mean the trophy was pushed or rolled instead of carried.'

Olivia looked at the principal, 'Are there any security cameras near the office?'

'Unfortunately, the cameras are under maintenance, so the school is not under surveillance for the moment,' replied Mr Greenwich.

Olivia murmured, 'That's a shame, so it means we have to rely on observations and questioning to solve this problem.'

What about you?

- When something happens that you don't understand, how do you react?
- Do you think it can be helpful to observe and analyse every detail?

Chapter 3: The big reveal

Before leaving the office, the trio gathered to reflect on what they had discovered so far. Sara very promptly read out all the clues that they had encountered:

- 1. The trophy disappeared between Friday evening and Monday morning**
- 2. The faint marking on the case, more specifically, a dragging mark**
- 3. No cameras in the school**

Max suggested, 'We need to check whether anyone saw anything over the weekend.'

Sara added thoughtfully, 'What are the closest places to the school office? There is a probability that the person might have been hiding in one of them.' 'That's a good

idea, Sara! We can check areas like the gym and playground for more clues,' Olivia suggested.

The trio decided to head towards the gym first. The room was strangely quiet, with the echo of their footsteps bouncing off the walls. Olivia scanned the premises carefully to check for anything unusual. She then suggested, 'Let's look in the storeroom; that's where the equipment is kept. It can be a convenient hiding spot,' declared Olivia.

'Look here!' Sara exclaimed, pointing to the floor near the storeroom. 'There's a muddy footprint, and it's fresh.'

Max crouched down to examine and said, 'This looks like a smaller shoe size; could it be a student?'

Olivia started **strategising and self-questioning**. 'What do we know so far?' she thought.

1. The trophy went missing between Friday and Monday morning. We have no security footage.
2. The muddy footprint is fresh.
3. There's no sign of Mr Davis in the gym at the time we've been investigating.

Sara suggested, 'Let's check the storeroom,' and she led the way. She carefully planned their next steps, focusing on places that made sense given the clues they had already gathered.

The door was locked, but Mr. Greenwich had given them keys to the rooms, and Max used them to unlock the door. The trio entered the room and found a large cardboard box amidst the equipment. It was hidden behind the equipment and was partially open. There was something inside the box, and it was shining. The trio approached the box and found the trophy inside.

Sara rushed forward. 'The trophy!' she exclaimed, pulling it out of the box.

Olivia frowned, 'Why would anyone hide the trophy here?'

Max nodded, 'That's an excellent question. Maybe if we find out who did it, we'll know why it's hidden in here.'

The trio paused to reflect on their discoveries and the steps they had taken so far. As Sara flipped through her notes, she realised she hadn't thought about how the clues fit together. Had she overlooked something?

She read through her notes again, and then it hit her. 'Oh! The markings,' she said, her eyes widening. 'The faint dragging mark—we found out that someone probably rolled the trophy away instead of carrying it!'

Olivia replayed the events in her mind. 'Who else has access to the office? And who would have a reason to move the trophy?'

Max nodded thoughtfully, then glanced at Olivia. 'Let's check the hallway for more clues. Maybe someone saw something over the weekend.'

But just as they started to leave the gym, Sara froze. She turned to Max and Olivia with a look of realisation on her face. 'Wait a minute. I remember something. A few days ago, we were talking about the trophy, and—' She hesitated, then continued, 'One of the students was acting strange as if they knew more about where the trophy was kept.'

Olivia narrowed her eyes, 'Who?'

Sara bit her lip and then began applying **self-assessment**, which meant reflecting on all their interactions over the past week. She thought of her conversation with her classmate, Ethan, who had seemed unusually interested in the trophy. He was the school head boy and had access to the office. He had even mentioned, just days before, how special it would be to hold it. At the time, Sara had brushed it off as excitement, but now it seemed suspicious. Also, as he sprained his wrist, it would explain the dragging marks.

Max's face turned pale as the realisation hit them all. 'Ethan... He was the one who always hung around the office after class. And did you see how loud he was cheering when the trophy was won? I must say he's been acting a bit... off lately.'

Olivia said, 'I think it's time we ask Ethan some questions.'

What about you?

- What strategy do you use when you need to solve a problem?
- How do you know when it's time to try a different way of doing something? For example, if you're practising for a school presentation but keep forgetting your lines, how do you know when to try a new way to remember them?



What do you think happened? Did the trophy leave those marks? If so, why did you pull or push it?

Chapter 4: Confronting Ethan

Sara, Max and Olivia went in search of Ethan. They planned to ask about his involvement without jumping to conclusions too quickly. They found Ethan sitting alone in the cafeteria. He looked tense, but as the head boy of the school, it was his responsibility to keep the trophy safe. So, Sara, Olivia and Max did not make any assumptions about his involvement but approached him calmly. Max spoke first and informed him about the discovery of the trophy. 'Ethan, we have been investigating the missing trophy and found it hidden in the gym storeroom. Do you know anything about it?'

Ethan looked shocked and quickly avoided their gaze. "I... I don't know anything."

But the way he shifted uncomfortably and fidgeted with his sleeves told a different story. His nervousness made it clear that the discovery had rattled him. Olivia, Max, and Sara exchanged glances. They were onto something.

Max thought for a moment, then started speaking his thoughts out loud, just like their teacher had taught them in class. '**Think-alouds** are a way to **say what you're thinking step by step to help figure things out**', the teacher had told them.

'Well, Ethan, let's go over what we know,' Max began, his voice steady. 'The trophy was moved sometime between Friday and Monday. We found muddy footprints in the gym, and the marks on the trophy case suggest someone dragged it instead of carrying it. And... you've been spending a lot of time in the office lately' He paused,

watching Ethan's reaction. 'It's okay if you took the trophy; we just want to understand why.'

Ethan remained silent for a long moment before finally speaking. 'I didn't mean to steal it or cause trouble,' he admitted. 'After the game, I walked past the principal's office, saw the trophy case, and I couldn't resist. However, when I tried to carry it, the case was heavier than I expected and began to drag. As I wasn't moving fast enough, I panicked and decided to take the trophy instead. I didn't take it to keep—I just wanted to hold it for a little while and see what it felt like. But when I came back to return it, I saw the teachers searching for it, and I got scared,' he confessed.

Sara gently said, 'We understand that as a head boy, you were thrilled with winning the trophy, but taking it was wrong. You should tell the principal and explain yourself.'

What about you?

- Do you have a curious and open mind? Do you think it helps you to see things from a different perspective?
- Do you sometimes think aloud when you have to figure something out, such as solving a puzzle?



Do you think Ethan is the culprit? What are your clues? What would be his motives?

Chapter 5: The Confession

Ethan, Sara, Max and Olivia approached Principal Greenwich's office. The trio gave a detailed explanation of their discovery. Mr Greenwich was surprised that Ethan was the one who took the trophy. Ethan apologised for his actions, and Mr Greenwich appreciated his honesty.

Turning towards the fantastic trio, 'You three did an excellent job not only in solving the mystery but also in how you solved it.' You were patient and thorough throughout the process,' Mr. Greenwich appreciated.

The school assembly was called, and the students were eager to find out if the trophy had been found. To everyone's surprise and excitement, Mr Greenwich proudly presented it to the entire school. But he never revealed who had taken it. Later, Mr Greenwich invited the three friends to the podium. As they approached the front, they felt a rush of pride and excitement. The whole school watched them with admiration.



‘The three detectives,’ introduced Mr Greenwich, ‘have demonstrated determination, patience, responsibility and a lot of hard work. For your excellent work, I would like everyone to give them a round of applause and acknowledge their efforts.’

The cheering grew louder, and Max, Sara, and Olivia exchanged proud smiles. They had solved the mystery, helped restore the trophy, and also learned a great deal through the process. They stood on the podium, receiving a lot of love and recognition from their schoolmates.

The assembly concluded, and as the gym emptied, many came up to congratulate the trio. ‘You guys are awesome!’ some of their classmates exclaimed. ‘You should start your detective club!’ The trio laughed, feeling proud of their work and the teamwork that had brought them success.

What about you?

- Do you ever stop to think about whether your way of solving a problem worked well?
- How do you figure out if the way you solved a problem was the best?



Today, I learnt...

The friends solved the mystery using the following:

- Analysis of clues and facts before taking action.
- Strategic thinking to adjust their approach.
- Communication and observation to gain a deeper understanding of the situation.

Questions for reflection

- Why is it important to draw up a plan before solving a problem?
- How did observation and critical thinking help to solve the puzzle?
- Why is it useful to question your assumptions during an investigation?

QUIZ

Question 1

When the trophy disappeared, how did the friends react?

- a) They immediately accused someone.
- b) They drew up a plan and collected clues.
- c) They asked the headmaster to look into it for them.
- d) They decided to drop the case.



Which approach do you think works best?

Question 2

Why did they look at the office carpet?

- a) Because they were looking for coins.
- b) Because they were looking for a clue to the disappearance of the trophy.
- c) Because they wanted to clean the room.
- d) Because they were hoping to find another lost object.



Can observing details help to solve a mystery?

Question 3

How did they find out who had taken the trophy?

- a) By questioning everyone in the school.
- b) By looking at the clues and thinking about who might have had access to the trophy.
- c) By finding a surveillance camera.
- d) Asking everyone directly if they were guilty.



When you encounter a problem, do you prefer to observe and analyse or act straight away without thinking?

TOOLBOX

These tools and exercises can help you in the way you learn.

We all learn in different ways.

Choose the tool that best suits your needs.

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

1/ Children's goal setting sheet

Objective: Enhancing self-regulation, motivation and participation

You can use the goal-setting sheet at the beginning of a learning unit and during the year to redefine your goals.

2/ ASCQ strategy

Objective: Evaluation, self-revision, self-reinforcement

This critical reflecting activity helps you learn how to take responsibility of your own writing, to improve your text's outcome and to enhance your self-reflection skills. It presents the metacognitive strategy ASCQ - **ASk** and **AnSwEr Critical Questions**, which shall guide you to improve your arguments in an argumentative text.

3/ Reflection diaries

Objective: Learning planning, time management

Before the learning process begins, you will fill in the chart with all relevant information. This way you will get an idea of the time needed for doing the activity and the steps on how to finish the activity.



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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