

Students in Laraine's kindergarten class began their year with a delicious mystery. By casting the students as detectives, Laraine seeks to lead the children in investigations that capture the imaginative nature of their age while providing the realists among them a voice as they test theory versus assumptions and search for clues. The Case of the Missing Gingerbread Men aims to bring the class together as a group by creating authentic opportunities for them to recognize the power of teamwork in solving problems. The unit provides context for a kindergarten-friendly way to instill one of the main attributes of a Nueva learner: the systematic gathering of evidence before making judgments.

1. Bake!



Despite Laraine's pleading and warnings of all previous gingerbread men going missing, the kindergartners insisted that they make cookies. This year, the students were able to persuade Laraine with promises of preventative measures for how they might distract or trap the cookies, should they decide to make an escape.

On baking day, each student followed a recipe from start to finish that yielded one gingerbread cookie. They carefully read each step of the recipe and mixed their dough to the desired consistency. Some of the bakers chose to make their cookie in a unique shape, thinking, for example, that legless cookies would be less likely to escape.



2. Prepare!



In the kitchen, mechanisms were set up to trap the cookies. The oven was booby-trapped. Colorful decoys were put in place. Several bakers stood watch as the cookies baked.

While the cookies were in the oven, Grant and Stephanie came into the kitchen looking for something to eat for lunch. They were curious about the kindergartners' presence there.



3. Investigate!



After lunch, students went back to the kitchen to get the cookies and found them missing! At this point, the kindergartners immediately went into detective mode. They grabbed their magnifiers and clue books, and set out to investigate!



4. Record!



Detective Journals, or Clue Books, were given to the students at the time of their initiation into the Detective Agency. They were told that as detectives, they will be encountering a lot of clues and evidence throughout the year. It is important that they have a place to record their observations so that they can be referred to at a later time.

On the day that the cookies disappeared, the detectives recorded clues and evidence as they searched for their cookies. The kindergartners also used their books to record interviews with suspects and document their theories. Some students wrote words while others drew pictures — each detective chose what information was worth recording.



5. Theorize!

The information in their journals was brought back to the group and shared during our detective meetings.

Andrew: I have a lot of people in my mind but I don't really know who stole them. Detectives only say what they know is true.

Laraine: Andrew has a really big question, and it is "Who really ate the gingerbread men?"

Mira: We found a feather, maybe a bird ate it. The big kids said they ate it.

Aviva: No, the big kids said they knew who ate them but that they wouldn't tell us.

Andrew: The gingerbread men don't have eyes, noses, ears, or anything. They probably went in different directions because they don't have any senses. They only have their sense of touch!

At this point, the teachers introduced the word "theory," explaining that it is something that a person believes to be true but has not yet proven.

Aviva: Grant or Stephanie must have ate them.

Laraine: Why do you think Grant or Stephanie might have eaten them?

Channing: He said that he liked them.

Laraine: What did Stephanie say?

Kids: That she loved them.

The class generated a list of suspects. Grant and Stephanie are at the top of the list.



6. Interrogate!

Before interrogating their suspects, students were asked, "What questions will give you helpful information about whether they took the cookies?"

The students generated a list of questions including:

- Where were you between 12:30 and 1:00 last Monday?
- Did anyone see you there?
- Were you in the kitchen?
- Did you see anything?

Stephanie's hair was inspected for crumbs that might match those found at the scene. Grant made a promise to tell the truth. Some detectives decided that it might be helpful to make signs and hang them around campus.

Will this case be solved? The detectives certainly think so!

