The missing picnic thing

Ages 4–7 with a grown-up · 5–10 minutes · Notice what changed

https://kiddos.ai/explorations/benny-everyday-detectives/the-missing-picnic-thing

Wonder together

Which picnic thing is missing?

Materials

Large wooden spoon; Empty plastic cup; Folded napkin; Basket.

Adult setup — read before trying

Set out a large wooden spoon, an empty plastic cup and a folded napkin, with a basket nearby. Choose a single safe reachable search area and keep the remaining objects in place. A local photo of only the starting objects is optional.

Try together

1. Together, lay out a cup, spoon and folded napkin. Look at each one.
2. Child looks away. Grown-up hides ONE object nearby, leaving the other two where they were.
3. Child looks back and says or points to what is missing. Looking at a starting photo is welcome.
4. Ask for one useful clue, such as “Look behind the basket.” Search only the agreed reachable area.
5. Find the object and check it against the starting three.
6. Swap: the child hides one while the grown-up looks away, then gives a clue.

Keep the comparison clear

Keep fixed: The same blue cup and folded yellow napkin stay in their starting places. The basket stays nearby, separate from the three-object row.

What changes: The wooden spoon is removed from the row and hidden behind the basket. The next turn changes who hides and who searches.

Look for: The spoon was present at the start and is missing from the second arrangement. The cup and napkin stay in place. A location clue helps Benny find the spoon behind the basket.

Explain with care

The spoon was present at the start and is missing from the second arrangement. The cup and napkin stay in place. A location clue helps Benny find the spoon behind the basket.

One object is hidden at a time in an agreed reachable area. A starting picture is welcome: this game does not test unaided memory. The pictured hiding place is an example, not the answer to every home round.

Talk about it

Which thing was here before and is missing now?

Answer cue: The wooden spoon. Compare the three objects on page 2 with the two on page 4.

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Which clue tells Benny where to search?

Answer cue: The spoon peeks from behind the basket; a grown-up can give a location clue such as “Look behind the basket.”

How can we check that we found the right thing?

Answer cue: Bring the spoon back and compare it with the starting objects or their picture. All three are present again.

A parent move: Show the starting objects together, then hide exactly one while your child looks away. Wait for noticing before offering one helpful location clue. Swap hider and finder without a timer.

Start simply: Start with two objects. Keep the starting arrangement visible in a picture if helpful. The child can point or direct an adult.

Explore further: Let the child choose which of the same three objects to hide and give the grown-up one useful clue. Keep the search inside the agreed area.

Return to it: Try the same game another day with one different familiar object. Keep two or three choices and notice which clue helped this time.

In the classroom

Flexible 15-minute small-group sequence; prepare materials first, and shorten or pause as needed.

2 min · Meet the picnic things

Name or point to the three objects and agree where searching is allowed.

3 min · Notice what is missing

Read to page 4 and compare with page 2 before revealing the search and check.

7 min · Hide, find and swap

Model one missing-object round. In pairs, one player hides while the other looks away; use one location clue, find and check, then swap with adult support.

3 min · Show the useful clue

Invite a gesture or short description of the missing object and the clue that led to its hiding place.

Understanding check

The child can indicate the missing object or use a clue to direct the search, with help or a starting picture if wanted.

Answer guidance: The spoon was present at the start and is missing from the second arrangement. The cup and napkin stay in place. A location clue helps Benny find the spoon behind the basket.

Participation choices: Accept pointing, showing, home-language words or directing an adult. Keep the materials within comfortable reach; no spoken answer is required. Start with two objects. Keep the starting arrangement visible in a picture if helpful. The child can point or direct an adult.

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Words to explore

missing — Not in the place where you saw it before.

clue — Something that helps you work out an answer.

check — Look again to see whether your idea fits.

Full adult notes and honest limits

Show the starting objects together, then hide exactly one while your child looks away. Wait for noticing before offering one helpful location clue. Swap hider and finder without a timer.

One object is hidden at a time in an agreed reachable area. A starting picture is welcome: this game does not test unaided memory. The pictured hiding place is an example, not the answer to every home round.

These are authored shared-play examples. Suggested ages and times are starting points, not an assessment or evidence of measured learning outcomes.

Related reading

Meet Benny in Benny the Forest Detective, an interactive Little Clue Tales forest mystery about noticing clues, counting, matching, sequencing and sharing. This household detective game is a new editorial adaptation, not a page from the book. Explore the digital story in Kiddos Books and browse Amazon for the physical titles currently available; no matching paperback is promised.

Activity sources

Kiddos — The missing picnic thing: authored game rules and pictured answer — https://kiddos.ai/explorations/benny-everyday-detectives/the-missing-picnic-thing

NAEYC — Making Math Meaningful for Young Children — https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/oct2014/making-math-meaningful

Read with confidence. Explore Kiddos Books with a grown-up.

App Store: https://apps.apple.com/app/id6720721998

Available physical books: https://www.amazon.com/author/kiddos-books