THE GREAT ESCAPE

Learning Through Virtual Escape Rooms

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Imagine turning up for DAS class one day and your teacher has switched off all the lights, and your classroom plunges into total darkness. What is going on? Your curiosity piques. Sombre and strange music plays in the background and the screen tells you that you have been virtually transported into a strange house where you and your friends have to escape from.

Does that sound exciting? How is that for learning instead of the usual comprehension passages, spelling tasks, and reading drills? Students will have to put their logical thinking skills, inferential skills, and reading skills to the test in order to decode the clues, complete the missions, and find their way to success!

A virtual escape room is usually presented on PowerPoint or google slides, and these slides have interactive elements that players can use to navigate the game. It can be played any time and anywhere, even for online lessons. Most importantly, virtual escape rooms will give students a chance to learn, problem solve creatively, and build teamwork in a fun and engaging way.

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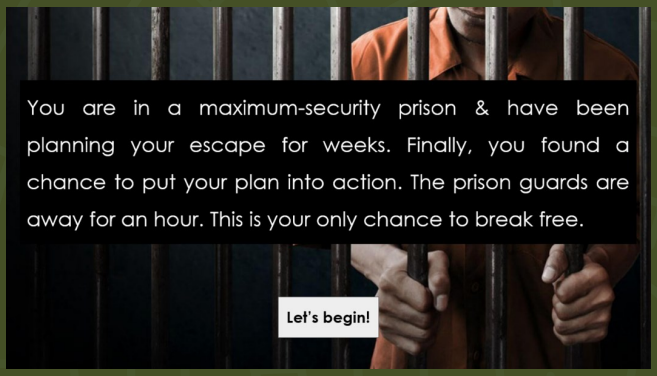
Common Escape Room Themes

- Treasure hunt
- Prison break
- Haunted house
- Desert island
- Underwater cave
- Find the zoo animals
- Alien invasion

There are endless possibilities of tasks and themes one can create for a virtual escape room, the sky's the limit! The difficulty of tasks and suitability of themes can be customised depending on the age and abilities of the students playing it.



Prison break themed escape room - escape the prison by solving clues and avoiding the guards

Treasure hunt themed escape room - Find the lost treasure from the cave by solving clues

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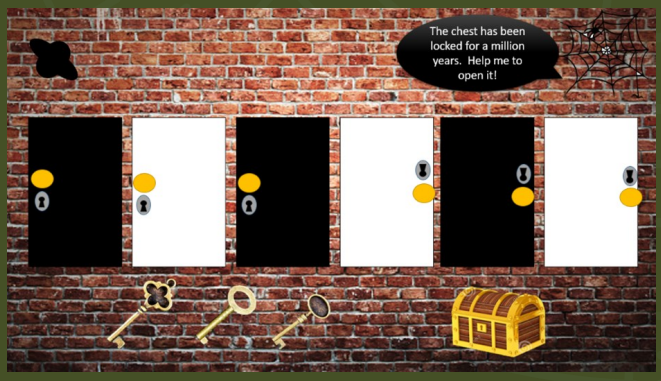
Task example 1 (Word Recognition):

In the following task, students will be given a string of letters and have to decipher the clue by finding real words that they have learnt. They then have to piece these words together to make sense of it. Through this task, our students will get to apply their decoding and word recognition skills.

Task example 2 (Comprehension):

In the following task, students will have to choose the right key by making observations. They will also practise simple comprehension skills by reading written instructions and executing them. In the example below, students will have read what the spider is saying, then match the mark on the wall with the pattern of the key to figure out which key would open the chest.

Students will also have to make sense of the written text inside the scroll, and use their deductive reasoning abilities to decipher the correct door. They will have to work together and use the process of elimination to select the correct answer. This example highlights how comprehension skills can be taught and reinforced in a fun and engaging way instead of the usual pen and paper format.



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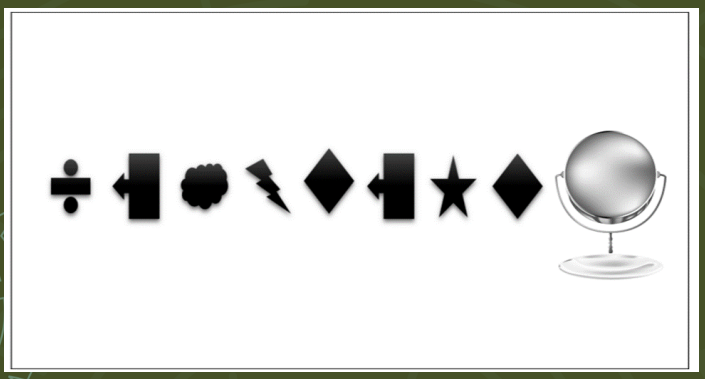
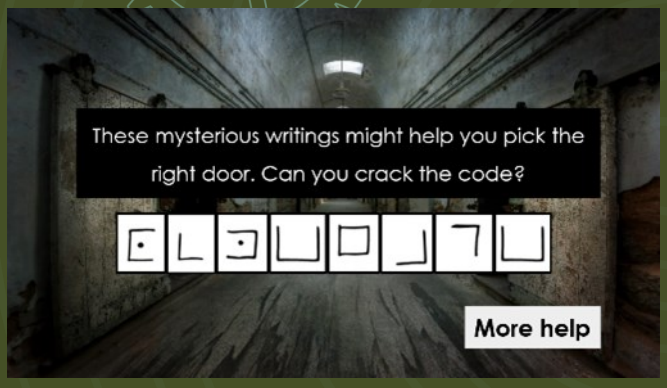
Task example 3 (symbol matching and letter rearrangement):

In the following tasks, students are tested on symbol matching and letter rearrangement to figure out actual words. Students are given legends and they will have to match symbols with their corresponding letters. Students will have to infer that a key property of a mirror is to reflect images, hence the letters they have decoded have to be spelled backwards to form an actual word. In the example below, students will have to rearrange the letters to obtain the actual clue, which is more suitable for higher ability students.





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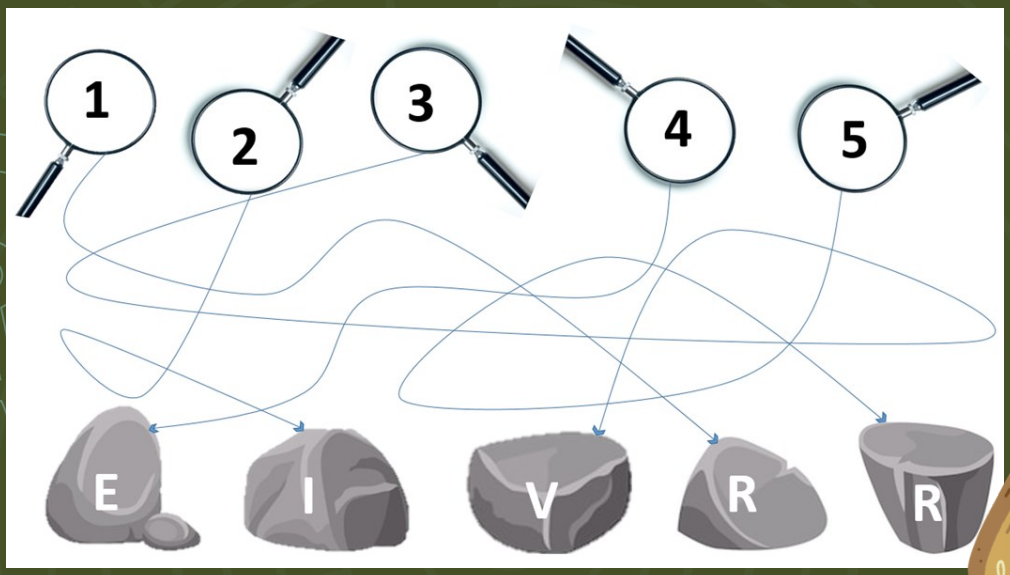
Task example 4 (eye tracking and sight word reading):

In the following task, students will be tested on eye tracking. This task is more suitable for younger students who may have difficulty tracking lines and letters when they read. Students will feel a sense of accomplishment when they can successfully piece the letters together and decode the word. For example, students were taught the sight word "river" during the term. In order to review the word, this task can be used, making sight word learning a lot more impactful.



Other interactive elements:

The above puzzles and obstacles can be either printed out for students or done virtually on powerpoint or google slides. Here are some other ideas if you are keen to try out interactive elements:

- Youtube videos - screen short clips and get students to identify clues within youtube videos
- Google forms - students can key 4-digit codes into the google form and test if their answer is correct
- Google maps - allow students to drag and drop the little human onto the street view and gather clues from what they see in the map
- Kahoot games - students can pass a mission if they successfully complete a kahoot game as a class

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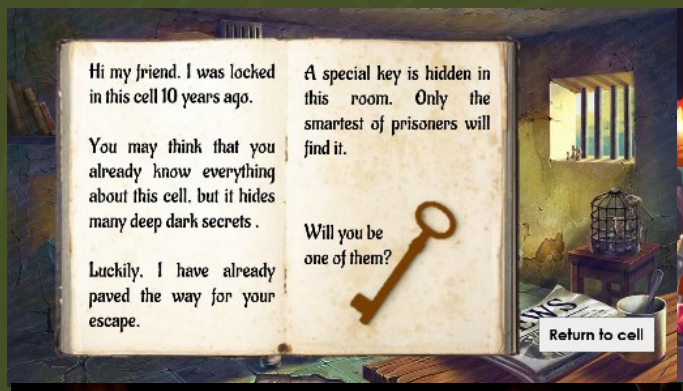
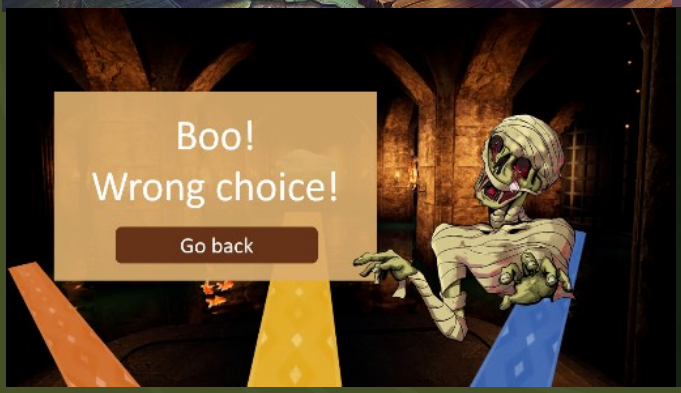
What makes a virtual escape room fun?

A multi-sensory experience - cool animations and sound effects
Students become a lot more immersed in the learning experience when the atmosphere and animations are realistic. Virtual escape rooms are the perfect platform to make that magic happen! This gives students the motivation to read the text, and comprehend written instructions as completing the mission is important and meaningful to them.

Interactive elements and instant feedback
Students also enjoy an element of surprise, which can be created through interactive elements. When students click around the room and spot a hidden clue, or when they receive a star for proceeding to the next stage, they attribute these positive reinforcements to their own efforts. This helps them to build self-confidence in an engaging way.





All in all, virtual escape rooms are an amazing learning tool to foster learning in a fun and engaging way. Besides building literacy, this is also a valuable opportunity for students to build their soft-skills such as collaboration and communication skills, as well as creativity in problem solving.