



# **Break out of the Routine with a Break-Out Box!**

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# What is a “Break-Out Box”?

- It can be either a real box with real locks or a digital activity.
- Its purpose is to engage participants in a puzzle-solving activity.
- In the classroom, it can be very motivating for students who benefit from a more tactile experience.
- It's a change of pace and is just plain fun!

# What makes up a “break-out box”?

--a main box (there may also be a secondary box or an envelope)

--a hasp for up to six locks

--a variety of locks – a keyed padlock, lettered locks, numbered locks, directional locks

--often an ultraviolet light and invisible ink pen are included for secret messages!



# Breakout Book

A book about creating breakout activities is a great tool! This one by Pete Dulany and Haley Kalinichenko is very helpful and step-by-step.

## Breakouts Made **Easy**



A guide to working with Breakout boxes and designing custom clues to fit ANY topic

Pete Dulany

Haley Kalinichenko

# What is “educational” about a break-out box?

- It is student-centered.
- It encourages such 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills as collaboration, problem-solving, team-building, and communication skills.
- It is inquiry-based learning and builds inference skills.
- It is highly motivational, especially for students who are not eager learners, and helps build perseverance.
- It's fun and a change of pace!

# What educational objectives can a break-out box serve?

- --review of learned material, to help it “stick”
- --introduction of cultural or historical information, as a lead-in to a unit
- --an activity for a club
- --reading strategies

# Main idea

- Students need to solve a series of puzzles in order to open the locks on the box. The puzzles can also be done digitally through Google Forms. It can be handled as a contest, with the first group finishing declared the winners; or small prizes can be placed in the box as a reward; or they can simply be given a “You did it!” paper – the main idea is really to solve the puzzles and reach their goal.

# Steps in compiling a box

- 1. Set your purpose – do you want to review material, pre-teach, assess, or just motivate?
- 2. How much time do you need – one class period? one learning station? several days? Allow for de-briefing time.
- 3. Choose the content, including the sub-topics you want to emphasize; you'll want a clue for each of these.
- 4. Will you go digital, or with a real box? What technology will you need?



# Steps in compiling a box

- 5. Will I do several boxes for small groups? or one box, with each group solving one clue? How will I form groups?
- 6. Create the clues! This is the real work—you have to create a clue and match it to the lock. You can use maps, pictures, or descriptions. Ciphers can be fun, and can also allow you to adapt information for number or directional locks. Invisible ink and UV flashlights help you hide clues. QR codes can direct participants to readings or extra information. Using a variety of types of clues supports different learning styles.

# Steps to compiling a box

- 7. Create a storyline and rewards, so your box has a purpose. The storyline can be a little silly, but participants need a backstory that gives them a reason to break out.
- 8. Print out clues and set the locks. For your sanity, be sure to keep track of clues, answers, and lock settings. When you reset the locks, ALWAYS write down the combination you want before you set it. If you have different clues for different boxes, you may want to color-code.

# Steps to compiling a box

- 9. Practice and set up the clues. Have a colleague or family member work through the clues to make sure they make sense.
- 10. Allow time for reflection; ask which clues were clear or confusing. Ask what they learned from doing the box.

# Things to consider

- For the first box with a class, use 3 simpler clues, so students learn how to use the locks and get the idea of how this works.
- Directional locks are cool, but also less reliable! Consider having a spare on hand. Also, have a back-up plan, in case something goes wrong.
- For higher-level classes, layer the clues to make them more challenging.

# Now it's time for our Breakout Box!

- You will be working in a group to solve a set of 6 clues. You will receive a box, an ultraviolet light pen, and an envelope. Begin by reading the clue in your envelope. Along the way, you may gain other items that could be useful to you as you work.
- Your goal: to be the first to achieve the goal stated in your first clue. Good luck!