



WHO STOLE THE HONEY POT? AN SEL KERNELS BRAIN GAME

"It is not the hearing that improves life, but the listening."

-Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

OVERVIEW

A student sitting in the middle of a circle with eyes covered guesses who "steals the honey pot."

LEVELS

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHY DO THIS?

- Focus Power helps students to listen and follow instructions, stay engaged in classroom activities, and persist even when interrupted or when facing challenges. They also use Focus Power to pay attention to others and have engaging conversations with peers.

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Integrated into a daily or weekly schedule as a routine
- During a designated SEL block of 10-15 minutes per day for Kernels practice or as time allows
- During a morning meeting, a transition, after recess, or at the end of the day
- Throughout the school year to create a supportive classroom community

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

MATERIALS

- A bell or other small object that makes noise

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice focusing and attention

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- How well do you sustain attention on something or someone, while ignoring distractions? What strategies and practices help you to maintain focus and attention (e.g, mindfulness, removing distractions from the room or setting)?
- Take a few minutes to read the [“Focus Power”](#) practice before introducing the game.

Note: Click [here](#) to download and print a card version of this practice that can be added to the other [Brain Games](#) practices to make an easy-to-use hand-held collection. See the [SEL Kernels](#) pack for additional activities.

THE BIG IDEA

The game is about careful listening to hear who stole the honey pot.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Introduce [Focus Power](#) to students, if necessary.
- Say the Big Idea (see above).
- Gather students in a circle. Choose one student to be the listening bear. The listening bear sits in the middle of the circle with the bear’s honey pot (which is represented by a bell or anything that makes a noise). The bear will need to pay attention to the sounds to guess who takes the honey pot.
- Ask the bear to cover their eyes by getting the entire class to say together, “Ms./Mr. Bear is very sleepy. Ms./Mr. Bear is dreaming deeply.”

- Silently point to another student you would like to be the honey thief. The honey thief will quietly go to the bear and take the honey pot back to their seat in the circle. The thief should ring the honey pot, and then hide it behind their back.
- Have the class say, “Ms./Mr. Bear, uncover your eyes and guess who has the honey pot.”
- Play multiple rounds, giving different students a chance to play the roles of bear and thief.

MUST DO

- Must require students to listen carefully for a specific sound.

CAN ADAPT

- Change the object or animal.

ADAPTATIONS

- For younger students, simplify the prompts to wake/put the bear to sleep, or just say them yourself without asking students to recite them.
- You can make the game more challenging by increasing the number of honey pots.

AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF

- What was it like to listen with your eyes closed? Did that make it easier or harder to focus? What did you hear when your eyes were closed?
- What else did you hear that might have been a distraction? What helped you focus your listening?
- Did you look around and use your Focus Brain Powers to notice any extra clues about who had the honey pot, like classmates’ facial expressions and body language (e.g., wiggles, smiles, eyebrows, etc.)?
- For more debriefing questions, see [Brain Games Practice](#).

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- For students who may need additional support, play in a small group to help them choose the honey thief from a smaller number of people. Ask the thief to ring the bell a few times, as well, if helpful.
- Create a schedule ahead of time for who will be Ms./Mr. Bear each day to assure children they will all have a chance to play that role.

SOURCE

This practice is part of the SEL Kernels project developed by the [EASEL Lab](#) at Harvard University.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do you notice students’ ability to focus and/or listen improving?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Children who are able to effectively manage their thinking, attention, and behavior are also more likely to have [better grades and higher standardized test scores](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Children use [cognitive regulation skills](#) whenever faced with tasks that require concentration, planning, problem solving, coordination, conscious choices among alternatives, or overriding a strong internal or external desire—all key skills for behavioral and academic success.

These skills enable children to prioritize and sequence behavior (e.g., put their pants on before their shoes), inhibit dominant or familiar responses in favor of a more appropriate one (e.g., raise their hand rather than blurt out the answer), maintain task-relevant information in mind (e.g., remember the teacher's request to wash hands and then put coats on before going outside), resist distractions, switch between task goals, use information to make decisions, and create abstract rules and handle novel situations.

TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

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Please email us at ggsceducation@berkeley.edu with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,
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