

# 10 Ways to Use "Letters from a Mystery Animal"

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6. Instruct the children to begin reading the letter by taking a "word walk": **Browse the letter** looking for words they recognize, words that look new or difficult, or words that look interesting. Prompt students to share the interesting words they've found. You may want them to begin by taking a few moments to highlight words they recognize. Briefly discuss and/or sound-out "Words to Talk About".
7. Have children **take turns reading the letter**, one sentence at a time, without stopping for conversation.
8. **Read a second time**, this time stopping to call on students to suggest clues from the letter. Record clues on the Detective Notes.
9. After clues are recorded, **write down students' guesses** on the righthand side of the Detective Notes, but do not yet confirm if the correct answer has been given.
10. **Compare clues to guesses**, prompting students to confirm whether or not the clues support a specific answer. Model thinking in this way:  
Teacher: "Let's see, we know that our mystery animal eats fish, swims fast, builds a nest from rocks, and keeps its eggs warm. Our guesses are bear, penguin, and shark. Tell me about these clues--do bears, penguins, and sharks do all of these things?"  
Student: Bears don't have eggs.  
Teacher: That's right, bears don't have eggs. Could our animal be a bear?  
Students: No. [Cross bear off list.]  
Teacher: What about sharks? Do they match all of the clues?  
Students: Sharks don't make nests from rocks. [Cross shark off list.]
11. The process of narrowing the list is an excellent way to **facilitate debate and discussion** among your students. It's important to guide their thinking, rather than take over for them. Helpful prompts include "Why do you think that?" "How do you know?" Establish some rules for taking turns and emphasize that it's okay to disagree kindly and change your mind. Students often like to use the phrase "I want to change my mind," instead of "I was wrong".
12. When students have determined which mystery animal has written to them, you can **conclude the activity**, or continue with any of the activities that follow.

**Applying New Skills:** During group read-alouds, have students recall back to the "detective skills" used when reading mystery animal letters, in order to make inferences. You may want to try prompts such as, "While we read, see if you can find clues that might tell you what will happen next/how the main character