

DICHOTOMOUS KEY ACTIVITY

In this activity you will be creating a dichotomous key. A dichotomous key is used to classify or sort groups of things whether they are living or nonliving things. A dichotomous key offers choices in pairs, one of which is true and the other false. In using the key you need to decide which choice is true. If that choice leads to another number or letter in the key, go to that place in the key and decide between the next two choices. If the choice you make leads to a name, you have probably identified your object.

Your objective is to create a dichotomous key that will allow you to identify each and every student in your class. You will be required to look more carefully at the students than you're normally accustomed to. Your key must be based on only the observable, external features of the students.

The choices in your key should begin with a general pair of choices. Each successive pair of choices should then be more specific. Some students will be able to be identified after only a few pairs of choices have been followed. Most students however, will only be identified after many pairs of choices have been followed.

What follows are a few pairs of sample choices that could be used in a typical class of students.

- 1a. Student wears eyeglasses..... go to 2
- 1b. Student doesn't wear eyeglasses..... go to 4

- 2a. Student is wearing sneakers..... go to 7
- 2b. Student isn't wearing sneakers..... go to 8

- 3a. Student has brown eyes..... go to 6
- 3b. Student doesn't have brown eyes..... go to 9

The pairs of choices that you decide on and the order in which they are written is entirely up to you. Other students may create an entirely different set of choices to base their dichotomous key on than the one that you have created. As long as your key is able to lead to the identification of each and every student in the class then it is an acceptable key.

You should write your key in pencil on lined paper. This way if you need to make a change it is more easily done, and the lines will help to keep your pairs of choices neatly arranged. Skip one whole line between each pair of choices in your key. If a choice identifies a student, then put the name of the student at the far right of the line for that choice.