Introduction
This lesson, designed for the language arts class, stresses critical thinking skills, particularly making inferences. Mystery Bag Capers provides an opportunity for individual writing activities and making spreadsheets. The driving question, “If you were going on a mystery trip of an unknown time frame and could pack only one small bag, what would you take?” requires students justify their choices and design a simple spreadsheet.

Student Outcomes
After completing this activity, students will be able to:
- Write a one-page paper using a word processing program.
- Design a simple spreadsheet.
- Make inferences and corresponding decisions.

Content Area and Grade Levels
Grade level: 6th – 8th
Content Area: Language Arts
This unit was designed and successfully used with students in grades 6-8 who have specific disabilities in reading and written language. In addition, some students carried an additional diagnosis of communication disordered and/or ESL. Adaptations for these needs are written into the lesson. However, this lesson works equally well with a regular education class.

Content Standards and Benchmarks
Language Arts
2) Students will understand and use Language Arts as a learning tool
   Benchmark: 5-8
   Apply critical thinking skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing
3) Students will listen and read for a variety of purposes. Benchmark: 5-8
   Use print and non-print sources to generate and apply options to solve problems in the classroom and daily life
4) Students will use a variety of listening and reading strategies appropriately. Benchmark: 5-8
   Use active listening skills to acquire information

Technology Usage
- MS Word
- Access to a photocopy machine for session 2
- One diskette
Resources
On line
Find the Confederate Bones and the Kudzu Kids
http://www.kudzukids.com/

Geo Mysteries with Rex the Dino – solve mysteries involving geology/geography
http://www.childrensmuseum.org/geomysteries/index2.html

Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries – information on the series of books and television shows
http://www.stratemeyer.net/stratemeyer/hardy/tvshow.htm

The Bobbsey Twins – some history on mystery books for children
http://www.stratemeyer.net/stratemeyer/bobbsey/bobbsey.htm

The Puzzle Club Counterfeit Caper – a mystery to read about
http://www.puzzleclub.org/pccaper.htm

The Mysteries of Hair – a mystery to solve
http://library.thinkquest.org/26829/

Process

Materials:
- Worn duffel bag with at least the following items:
  - over-the-counter-medication such as aspirin or cough syrup
  - ticket or lottery stub
  - guide book for any country other than the United States
  - pen
  - one adult sized boot or shoe
  - children’s book
  - bottle of vitamins
  - small mirror and comb
- Make sure all items do not look new. Ideally, there should be at least 12 items in the bag.
- Reward poster

Preparation:
1. Prepare the mystery bag and reward poster prior to activity.

Tasks: (actions)
Day 1
1. Place the mystery bag in a prominent place in classroom so that students notice it as they enter the classroom.
2. Explain it was found near a bus station.
3. Open the bag and examine contents. As each item is taken out, place it on a flat surface where students can see it.
4. Elicit conversation about the bag from class. Who do they think this bag belongs to? What evidence supports their thinking? Does the owner of the bag speak a language other than English?

5. Direct students to write a one-page description of the owner of the duffel bag, based on inferences made from the contents of the bag.

Day 2

1. Review events from the previous day.
2. Pose the driving question, “If you were going on a mystery trip of an unknown time frame and could pack only one small bag, what would you take?”
3. Direct the students to make a list of 10 things they would take. Remind them that all 10 items must fit into a duffel-size bag, and that they may be traveling to a place that does not have electricity. They will need to justify their choices.
4. Group students. Each group needs one scribe and one reporter.
5. Instruct each group to compare similarities and differences with each list, recording on paper and then on the spreadsheet.
6. Photocopy each group’s spreadsheet making one copy for each group.
7. Instruct groups to add the data from all other groups to make a master list.
8. Each group writes a story about the mystery trip incorporating ten items found in a personal duffle bag.

Presentation
Each group will share its story with the class.

Credits
The original idea was presented in a workshop format at Sandia High School in Albuquerque, NM. Debbie O’Rouke adapted it to fit the needs of her students and to integrate technology.

Assessment
Prior to introducing this activity decide if group or individual assessment is appropriate.

Extension
Links in the Resource section provide opportunities for students who wish to solve more mysteries.
The Mission
Do you enjoy solving mysteries? Are you a super sleuth? There are two mysteries that need to be solved. During Case One, you will work on your own. In Case Two, you will join a group in order to come up with a solution. Good Luck.

Case one:
The local airport has discovered an unclaimed duffel bag that has been there for several months. Authorities are offering a $1000.00 reward. The airport has brought the bag into your classroom for you to examine the contents and find some clues. It is important to find the owners so that some very important items can be returned to them. Your job is to figure out who might own the duffel bag.

Case two:
Adventures R Us is providing a free trip to the bravest person willing to go to an unknown, uncharted part of the world. This trip has no stated designation, and you will arrive at no given time. The time could be today, years ago, or in the future. You have been selected to go!

Getting Ready
As any good detective knows, that in order to solve a mystery you must have the right tools. The following is a list of items you will need or use.

Supplies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Used for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paper and pencil</td>
<td>Recording important information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formatted diskette</td>
<td>Saving information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A duffel bag full of items (provided by teacher)</td>
<td>Investigating clues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spreadsheet software</td>
<td>Recording data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word processing program</td>
<td>Writing your report</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Your Adventure

Case One:

1. Read the $1000.00 reward page.
2. Now take another look at all the items in the bag and the bag itself.
3. From the contents of the bag, deduce everything you can about the bag’s owner (including, but not limited to gender, ethnic origin, family background, education, etc.).
4. Click on the NOTE PAD OR PEN.
5. Write a one-page paper describing whom you think the owner might be. Tell why you have made the inferences you made. Remember to proofread your work.
6. Place your final draft in your writing portfolio.

Case Two:

Adventures R Us is giving you a free trip. This trip has no stated designation and you will arrive at no given time. It could be today, years ago, or the future.

1. If you were going on this free mystery trip of an unknown time frame, what would you take if you were only aloud to pack one small bag? There is a limit of 10 items, and they must fit into the duffel bag from Case One. Remember you do not know where you are going, nor if there will be modern amenities.
2. Next, your teacher will assign you to a group of detectives. Within your group, decide who will be the scribe and who will be the reporter.
3. Compare your list of travel items with the lists of other detectives. Have the scribe list all the items you have in common on a sheet of paper. Which items did you have in common with other members of the group? Are any unique?
4. Next have the scribe, with the help of the others, enter the data into a database (spreadsheet)
5. List the names of each item you would take vertically on your spreadsheet. List the names of each student horizontally. (You only need to create one spreadsheet for your group.)
6. Turn this information into your teacher. She will photocopy your information and give a copy to each of the other groups. She will also give you a copy of the information from each of the other groups. Add the data from the other groups to your spreadsheet.
7. As a group, write a short story of your trip. Where did you end up? What year was it? Could you use all ten items you had in your bag?
8. Illustrate your story with at least five pictures downloaded from the Internet.

Digging Deeper

For extra credit, make a graph (pie, bar, or whatever type you would like) summarizing the information on your spreadsheet. Did a lot of people choose the same items? If you were going to make your list of 10 items all over again, would you make changes now that you have seen what others are bringing? Did you find that you forgot some very necessary items, such as medicine?
Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>amenities</th>
<th>authorities</th>
<th>deduce</th>
<th>horizontally</th>
<th>inferences</th>
<th>mystery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

amenities -/noun/  
3: something that conduces to comfort, convenience, or enjoyment

authorities -/noun/  
3 a: persons in command

deduce -/transitive verb/  
1: to determine by deduction; specifically: to infer from a general principle

horizontally -/adjective/  
1 a: of, relating to, or situated near the horizon b: parallel to, in the plane of, or operating in a plane parallel to the horizon or to a base line: LEVEL

inferences -/noun/  
1: the act or process of inferring: as a: the act of passing from one proposition, statement, or judgment considered as true to another whose truth is believed to follow from that of the former

mystery -/noun/  
2 a: something not understood or beyond understanding: ENIGMA d: a piece of fiction dealing usually with the solution of a mysterious crime

scribe -/noun/  
2 a: an official or public secretary or clerk b: a copier of manuscripts

vertically -/adjective/  
2 a: perpendicular to the plane of the horizon or to a primary axis: UPRIGHT b (1): located at right angles to the plane of a supporting surface (2): lying in the direction of an axis: LENGTHWISE
Resources

Do you like to solve mysteries? Do you want to read more about mysteries? Check out the links below for more mystery-solving adventures!

Find the Confederate Bones and the Kudzu Kids
http://www.kudzukids.com/

Geo Mysteries with Rex the Dino – solve mysteries involving geology/geography
http://www.childrensmuseum.org/geomysteries/index2.html

Hardy Boys/Nancy Drew Mysteries – information on the series of books and television shows
http://www.stratemeyer.net/stratemeyer/hardy/tvshow.htm

The Bobbsey Twins – some history on mystery books for children
http://www.stratemeyer.net/stratemeyer/bobbsey/bobbsey.htm

The Puzzle Club Counterfeit Caper – a mystery to read about
http://www.puzzleclub.org/pccaper.htm

The Mysteries of Hair – a mystery to solve
http://library.thinkquest.org/26829/
$1000.00 REWARD

Looking for the owner of a green duffel bag.
Bag was left at the local airport on November 18.

Contents include:

- An unopened bottle of aspirin
- A lottery stub for the drawing held *November 21st
- A guide book for China and Australia
- 13 pencil plus 25 colored pencil with what seems to be a sketch book
- A pair of hiking boots
- A pair tennis shoes
- A mysterious box wrapped in tin foil
- The book called **The One Minute Manager**
- A half eaten cookie
- A toothbrush
- Two Shirts
- Shampoo
- 3 pair of socks with an extra one

If you are or know of the owner of this bag please call 1-800-SEEKOUT