

Make a branching database on animals

How you might run a branching database activity.

Play '20 questions' to identify some animals.

The 20 Questions game gets the children to practice the idea of asking questions that have a yes or no answer. A set of animal cards, made from photographs from magazines and stuck onto card



are a good stimulus. You can spell their names and add key features on the back of each card. The children play the '20 Questions' game with the 'leader' picking up one card at a time.

Introduce the computer program.

Use a ready-made branching database. Pick up an animal card and work through the program - these are quite structured programs so there are no real operational points to consider. Get the computer to identify the animal. Let the children get the hang of this.

Leave the computer.

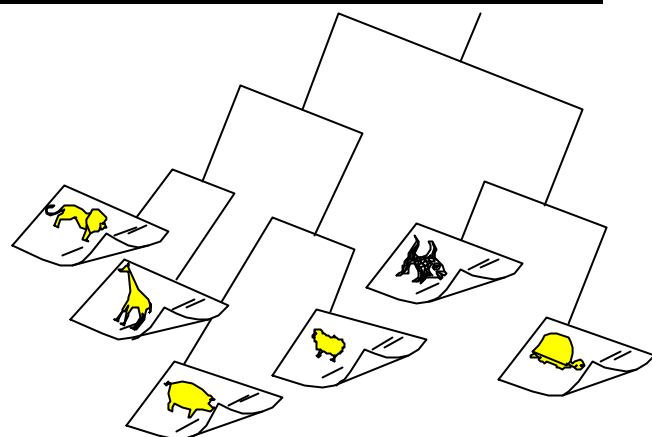
Now get the children to sort all the animal cards into sets. Get them to record the reasons for putting things into sets like 'Lives in water' and 'Doesn't live in water'. They can label them with a *Post-it* note or similar.

Arrange the animal cards to make a key.

If you wish, use ribbon or paper strips to link the sets together, like a key, as in the diagram above.

Return to the computer.

Start a new database using just two animals, one from two different sets. Do this yourself and then get the group to think of a question to distinguish one animal from the other. The key works just a bit better when you start off with more general questions such as, 'Does it live in water' rather than 'Does it meow?' With younger groups you can economise on the words used - and enter questions like 'Meow?' or 'Live in water?'

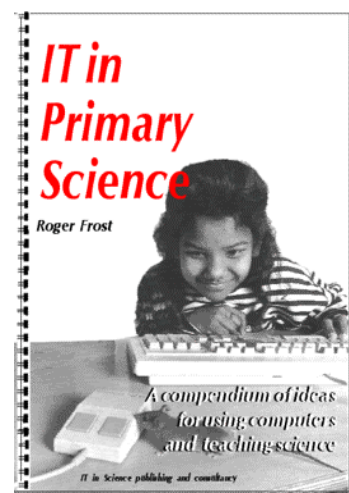


Build up the database.

The children now pick up one card at a time and work through the program. As they do so the database will grow. The *Post-it* labels with the questions on can be to hand as prompts. The children should work in groups of two or three. In larger groups things can get boring quite quickly. A group of three can take turns to pick an animal, think of a question and use the keyboard. Children should save their work frequently. If they make a mistake it's often easier to get the last good copy back off the disc rather than try to puzzle out what has gone wrong.

Get the others to test the key.

Children can try out the key and suggest changes. improve the questions. You can use the finished database both as a handy key and to introduce the activity next time around.



From Roger Frost's *IT in Primary Science* - www.RogerFrost.com

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